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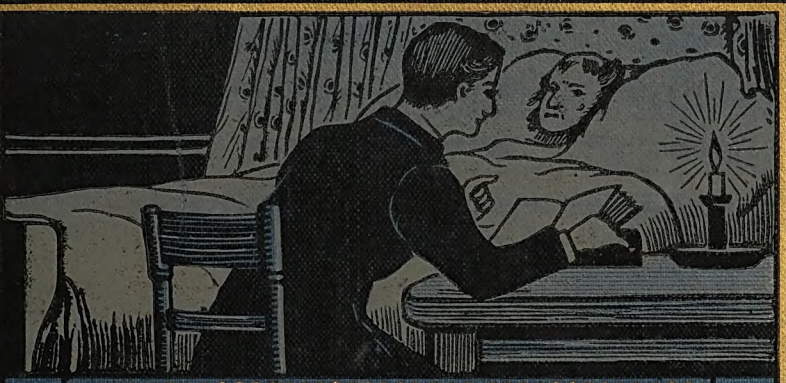

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Colonel Harker's introduction to Mr. Benson.—p. 166.

Frontispiece.

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HIS CHOICE—AND HERS

THE STORY OF AN EPISODE

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN

AUTHOR OF "AFTERTHOUGHT HOUSE," ETC.

AND

H. LOUISA BEDFORD

AUTHOR OF "EVELYN WOOD'S ORGAN LESSONS," ETC.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

SOME short time since, upon the death of my grandmother, Lady Wylmington, with whom I was privileged to spend a considerable portion of my time, certain effects came into my possession, and amongst them a sealed packet, inscribed with my own name in her handwriting. From the character of the writing I saw at once that it had been written during the last weeks of her life; and upon opening the packet I found it to contain some note-books, entirely devoted to a record of my brother's life, from the time when he and I were left orphans, and came into frequent contact with our maternal grandmother. We were not wards of Lady Wylmington. Our father's relatives had the charge of us; but she watched over us nevertheless with keen interest, and some of our happiest hours were

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spent at Park Lane and Monckton Abbey, between which two localities she divided her time. She was a widow when we first visited her, and I have always believed that she had seen great sorrow; but she seldom spoke of herself, so that on this point I cannot speak with authority.

My brother Cyril loved her ardently. I gave her all the love I had for anybody besides himself. But Cyril always filled my heart, and I think I almost grudged any deep affection not lavished upon him. But of myself I have no need to write. My life holds in its span nothing of interest to others.

I think I know why my grandmother left these note-books to me, instead of having them destroyed amongst her private journals and other memoranda; and why that decision respecting them appeared to be made late in life. I spent much of my time with her during the last months she was spared, and I think she knew how near was the end better than I did. We were talking one evening of an episode in the life of the one very dear to us both; and after something she said, I remember that I burst out—

"Grandmother, I know that Cyril was always very dear to you—I know what you did for him,

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and how he loved you; but I have sometimes thought that you never understood him—never truly appreciated him. I may not be right; but all through that time I felt it. I used to think that nobody fully understood him but myself!"

Lady Wylmington smiled her far-away sweet smile as I spoke, and answered with her habitual gentleness—

"Possibly not, my dear Dorothy. When human lives are sundered by two generations of time and thought, full mutual understanding is very difficult. I am not sure that one human being ever understands another, that one heart can ever truly enter into the joy, the pain, the passion of another. But love makes amends for all such lack of comprehension, and so it has been with Cyril and me."

And again, while still speaking of that same episode in his life, when I broke into vehement reproaches against one whom I have found it singularly hard to forgive, my grandmother answered gently—

"My dear, you should try to look at the matter from Sylvia's own standpoint. Believe me, there are two sides to every question. I know that she has kept a record of those days, for she has shown it to me. Ask her to show it to you, and read it

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with sympathy and not with scorn. Life is too sacred to be spent in mutual recrimination and criticism. It is only long enough to teach us the lesson of brotherly love."

I did not follow my grandmother's counsel then ; but later on, when I had her account of this episode in my keeping, as well as my own account of it (written at the time when my heart and mind were full of it, and I could think of nothing else), I began to wonder what Sylvia's would be like. I had written mine, as I say, when my heart was so full of Cyril that the only relief I could find was the setting down in order of the events of that time, for circumstances enabled me to glean from one and another every little detail, and I felt as though I had been a witness of it all. And now, when I read the record kept by our grandmother of these events in his life, and felt all through in reading, how she must have loved him, my interest and curiosity were stirred to know what Sylvia would think and feel about it all—what her account of that time would be ; and although we have seen but little of each other of late, and always feel as though there were a cloud between us, I went to her and asked for those papers which my grandmother told me were in existence.

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She gave them to me with a humble sweetness which went far to disarm my jealous dislike and distrust of her. And as we fell into talk, and I spoke of my own and my grandmother's papers on that episode in the life of one whom we all had loved, the tears came into her eyes, and she said to me—

"Dorothy, I have given you my record. May I not see yours too?"

"You shall when all is in order," I answered, remembering that in the bitterness of my heart I had set down words once which now I should scarcely wish to stand. "I shall go through all the records, and make one consecutive narrative out of all—showing how it appeared to each of those who lived through it—for I think I know how Cyril felt. He always called me his 'second self.' When my task is done you shall see it, Sylvia. You have the right."

And going back to my lonely home, I set about to write out in due order the central episode in my brother Cyril's life. If it fails in commanding interest, charge all the failure upon me.

DOROTHY BENSON.

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HIS CHOICE—AND HERS

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG CRUSADER

WHEN does a man's life commence? . . . And in writing the story of one episode, how much is it needful to tell of what went before? . . . So many visions rise up before the mind's eye in recalling even that one episode! . . . But a glimpse of the past will serve the present purpose.

Two children, a boy and a girl, sat together on a Sunday afternoon with a great book on the floor beside them. Around them rose the panelled walls of a grand old room, and long shafts of golden light came slanting in upon the pair through the diamond-latticed panes of a great oriel window. The splendour of a stormy autumn sunset was in the sky, and the western room was filled with the

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peculiarly transparent light which is brought by "the clear shining after rain." The golden glory touched the children as they sat together upon the rich fur rug before the glowing fire of logs. It encircled the head of the boy with the radiance as of an aureole; and the liquid dark eyes fixed sometimes upon the open page of the book, sometimes upon the eager face of his little sister, yet raised ever and anon towards the window and the great shafts of light which came pouring in, were full of the glow and fire of an enthusiasm deeply buried in the ardent and sensitive nature of the eight-year-old child.

There was one more figure in that quiet room, a black-robed figure sitting in a high-backed, carved chair; and one glance from the boy's face to the one standing out in relief from the dark leather behind the head, bespoke them near of kin. The one face was old, as the silvered hair and the expression told—albeit the beauty and freshness of youth were marvellously preserved—the other that of a child; yet the clearly-chiselled, high-bred features were the same, as was also the look of resolute purpose and strong will about the lines of the mouth and chin. In the grandmother this resolution was tempered by a peculiar sweetness and depth of expression, indicative of a nature which had been through deep waters, and had come out purified and ennobled from thence. In the child it lay latent as yet, hardly understood by its possessor, but growing by imperceptible stages with each stage of his development. The likeness was

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very strong now, probably it might become less so with the advance of time and the growing manhood of the boy ; yet a keen physiognomist might be tempted to prognosticate that the face of Cyril Benson, should he live to mature life, would again become almost the counterpart of that of Lady Wylmington, his maternal grandmother. The eyes were strangely alike both in colour and expression — dark and soft, beautifully shaped, and fringed with long black lashes. The child's were dreamy with the "long, long thoughts" of boyhood, the grandmother's full of that wondrous brightness and softness which comes of constant musing on the "things that are not seen, which are eternal." But the likeness between the expression of the faces at times was singular and striking, even the little five-year-old maiden observed it often with a sense of wonder and fascination.

The book lying open before the children was one of those quaint and ancient volumes in which some mediæval artist has sought to depict the vices of the world, showing them in their most hideous form. In one large plate drunkenness was portrayed ; in another, gambling ; in another, theft ; in another, tyranny and cruelty. Weird and fantastic as the ancient woodcuts were, they possessed a strange fascination for the children—a fascination all the greater perhaps from the fact that they were only partially understood. Cyril had been turning the pages one by one with the endless patience he always exercised towards his little sister, giving to her the expected explanations

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at every pause, and leaving out nothing which she looked for as each familiar picture was turned; but suddenly upon that autumn afternoon, whilst the golden glory played round him and seemed to fill the room itself with illuminating radiance, the boy threw out his hand and smote the page of the book before him with his open palm.

"When I am a man," he said, and his eyes dilated as he spoke, as if with the magnitude of a thought almost too great for his powers of expression; "when I am a man, I shall go out into the world, and I shall fight all *that!*"

"Oh, Cyril! how?"

"I shall fight the devil," was the answer, spoken in low, vibrating tones. "All that is the devil's doing! I shall go out and fight him. It is all his work—every bit of it. It will be *my* work to fight against him!"

"Oh, Cyril—how can you? Will you have a big sword and shining armour, like St. George on the window in church? Will you kill a great dragon, as he is doing?"

Again the glance of the boy kindled with a strange brightness as he raised them slowly from the page of the book, and fixed them full upon the glory of the sun-set sky.

"I shall have a sword," he said slowly. "I shall have armour too." He paused for a long time, and sat looking out through the western oriel as though some vision were passing before him. "I shall be a clergyman," he said at last.

* * * * *

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"The beautiful Miss Benson" went to school, where his face earned him at first the above soubriquet, odious in the ears of a boy. Cyril bore the appellation silently for three days, and then he knocked down a boy some degrees taller than himself who had tauntingly used it (in revenge for Cyril having surpassed him in scholarship in class), and offered then and there to fight anybody else who dared to call him that again. Very soon the successful use of his fists proved his right to belong to the masculine gender, and the opprobrious epithet was dropped. Nevertheless, Cyril Benson kept his beautiful face and colouring to the close of his earthly life.

As is often the case, Nature lavished her gifts with unwonted freedom upon one who was singularly indifferent to the possession of them, since it would be hard to find any one who cared less for appearances than Cyril Benson. He was rich, yet he had not a single expensive taste, unless a passion for theological books could be so called; he was highly connected and well-born, and yet he never thought of this as an advantage. Indeed, in his early youth he was inclined to be severely scornful on the supposed advantages of blue blood.

> "Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood,"

was a favourite quotation with him at one time, and he fearlessly numbered amongst his Oxford friends men who were stigmatized by his set as

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"awful cads," because their fathers happened to be in trade.

He was singularly unconventional, and yet eminently lovable, as was testified by the deep personal affection he inspired in those about him. Perhaps nothing is more difficult to define than that quality best described by the word "charm," which both Cyril Benson and his grandmother possessed in so great a degree. It was a quality which encircled them like an atmosphere, and exercised its spell upon those who came in contact with them. In Cyril it lay perhaps in his absolute and unconscious unselfishness, in his enthusiasm for all that was lofty and pure and true, in his noble scorn of wrong, and his fearless, stainless uprightness, which made him a power even amongst men who behind his back called him a mystic and a fanatic, yet could not meet his clear gaze, so full of searching scrutiny, with words of blasphemy or of irreverence upon their lips.

This enthusiasm and boundless energy found a vent in the Ritualistic movement, one wave of which happened to be at its height when Cyril was at Oxford. He had never wavered from his childhood's resolve to train himself for the priesthood. No thought of any more ambitious profession had ever made him swerve one hair's-breadth from his early determination. His life had been consecrated by that steadfast resolve, and the desire to be up and doing only increased with his realization of the fearful evil at work in the world around him.

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Not that Cyril permitted himself to be one-sided, or that theology or even books absorbed all his time. He passed his examinations with ease and brilliancy—so much brilliancy of scholarship and fullness of thought did his papers show, that the authorities would fain have kept him at Oxford as one of themselves had he been willing; yet he trained his body as carefully as his mind. He was tall and strong, and he came from a soldier stock, so that feats of skill and strength were natural to him, and he was no tyro either on the river or in the cricket-field. He had been a fearless rider from childhood, when his grandmother would set him on a pony and bid him gallop bare-backed across the park, herself watching his progress and giving him an approving smile when he returned flushed and triumphant from his exploit. If as time went by he grew rather over-grave and studious for his years, he was yet so convinced that if he were to have his best to offer to the service to which he was pledged, he must have the sound mind in the sound body, that he was never seriously tempted to neglect healthy bodily exercise; and moreover, that inherent gift of sympathy with his fellows, which was one of his best endowments, made it easy for him at the moment to throw himself heart and soul even into a game. Everything he did he did with his might, and perhaps this was the secret of his success.

At three-and-twenty he was ordained deacon, and obtained work in an East London parish in

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preference to any more agreeable locality to which he might easily have been appointed. Here he threw himself body and soul into the encounter with sin and wickedness around him, and fought, as he had told his little sister long ago that he meant to fight, against the devil and his works in the very citadel of his power, and amongst those over whom the powers of evil had obtained a fearful mastery.

And with what result? Judging by externals alone, none. Outwardly he failed. He was worsted in the fray. His youth and inexperience were against him; his very zeal and enthusiasm led him into errors of judgment. His outspoken rebukes offended many, his pronounced opinions alarmed his Vicar. His austerity of life vexed his friends, and he was looked upon as a religious fanatic wasting his life in a profitless struggle against the invincible.

Yet through all these difficulties Cyril Benson ploughed his way with indomitable resolution and a dauntless courage which made the fight itself almost congenial to him. He was fulfilling his childhood's dream. He was fighting the devil with every weapon in his armoury—and he was convinced that sooner or later victory must be his; and this sanguine conviction did not die with the sense of personal failure—only modified itself. His youthful hope that he could set the world to rights by his unaided efforts died a natural death; but in proportion as his confidence in his own power lessened, his faith in the ultimate victory of the

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Church grew and strengthened. Many would fall in the ranks of that great militant body, himself probably amongst the number; but final victory was certain—for was not God the ruler of all? What did it matter if the soldier knew not what he was doing, but only fought blindly against fearful odds, or fell at his post wounded to death? The General was working out his plans all the while, and saw the victorious end all through. In that was Cyril's hope and confidence. That thought kept him from despondency and discouragement. With results he had nothing to do; all his duty was to be found at his post when called.

After some years he began to make his mark. His gift of keen sympathy gave to his sermons a power over the hearts of his hearers quite independent of the mere excellence of his oratory; although, as his reserve melted before the fire of his earnestness, his natural eloquence and fullness of thought made itself distinctly felt, even by those who could not have found words in which to express their sense of appreciation. But it was not in preaching alone that his success was won. The poor amongst whom he lived could not fail to be impressed by the stern self-denial of his life. Gradually they learned to know that he was rich, as experience had taught them he was generous; but his mode of living was as simple as their own. If, like John the Baptist, he was bold to rebuke vice in others, he could never be accused of leniency towards his own faults. If his creed were somewhat stern and his standard of righteousness high, at

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least those amongst whom he laboured came to recognize the fact that no one strove so hard as their teacher to be true to the one or to attain the other. His unflinching honesty made him many enemies, but even his opponents respected him, and he had a few staunch friends and followers.

It was undoubtedly a blow to these followers when (Cyril being then twenty-nine) the Bishop of London offered him the living of St. Chads—a piece of ecclesiastical preferment by no means eagerly sought after or easy to fill. The parish lay in the heart of East London, and the stipend was a hundred a year. The population was estimated at a little under ten thousand souls. Small wonder that even earnest men shrank from the difficulties of such a cure. Nevertheless it was exactly the field of work that Cyril Benson desired, and for which his previous work had fitted him. For one whole night he considered the offer upon his knees, and the next day he wrote to the Bishop gratefully accepting the living, and promising to do his best there.

Amongst his friends in his own walk in life there was a great outcry, for a series of sermons which the young man had consented recently to preach in a fashionable church (on behalf of his Vicar's poor parish), had attracted considerable attention, opened both the hearts and the purses of the hearers, and made men prophesy great things of the "rising young priest." But Cyril, whilst listening to remonstrances with unfailing patience and courtesy, never swerved one hair's-breadth

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from his resolve through the world-wise arguments of men, or the soft blandishments of the women of his acquaintance. His mind was made up, and somehow he let people know it without needing to have recourse to argument or to harsh repudiation of their well-meant counsel.

Perhaps it was all the easier for Cyril to pursue the even tenor of his way from the fact that there was for him only one woman in the world—and that one his grandmother. Whilst holding womanhood to be a thing deeply sacred, and revering it with the beautiful singleness of heart and true chivalry of a strong and pure and tender nature, Cyril knew little of the individual nature of women, and had gone very little into the society of ladies. He was almost shy with them when brought face to face. If his beauty, his gentle dignity of manner, and his quiet reserve of power fascinated them, they had not so far fascinated him. Of marriage he had never even thought, holding as he did pronounced views about the celibacy of the clergy. His personal love was lavished almost exclusively upon his sister and his grandmother. The one, as he knew, invariably approved every step and decision he took ; the approval of the other he greatly prized, and he was anxious to assure himself of it at this juncture of his life.

It was in that stately, panelled room where, as an eight-year old child, he suddenly said, " I shall be a clergyman ! " that he now unfolded to the silver-haired woman so like himself, the prospective change in his life. She listened in silence as

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he told his tale—told it with that unconscious eloquence and subdued enthusiasm which was one secret of his power over men, and then she said with her slight, fine smile—

"You have already sent your answer to the Bishop?"

"Yes," he answered quietly, "I have accepted."

"Then this is not a visit of counsel? You are not asking my advice in the matter?"

"No," answered Cyril frankly, "I asked advice in another quarter. But I do covet your sympathy —your approval."

She laid her white hand upon his, though her eyes were looking straight out of the window towards the western horizon.

"My sympathy you have. My aid you may always command to the extent of my powers to bestow it. If you have taken the highest Counsel, I do not ask that you should take mine too. In the light of that Counsel—in the strength of the gift bestowed upon you at your ordination, you should know better than I can ever do whether you are qualified for the task you have undertaken."

"Ah, now you humble me!" he cried quickly. "It is not my own fitness for the office which governs my decision. God knows how deeply conscious I am of my own shortcomings, my weakness, my impotence. But this comes to me as a call. I did not seek it. I never thought of it. I had never even heard of St. Chads. The need there is so terribly sore! There are so few

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men able (through force of circumstances) to take it. When I had the Bishop's letter, and when I 'laid it before the Lord' in prayer, it seemed as though a voice said, 'Who will go forth into this den of evil and fight the battle there for Me?' What answer could I give save the one of the prophet of old—'Here am I: send me'?"

"If you go forth in that spirit, Cyril," answered Lady Wylmington gently, "I am very sure the Lord will be with you, though the victory may not be yours."

"That I am prepared for. That I fully expect," was the eager answer. "I have learnt many lessons during these past six years. But tell me that I may take your blessing and approval with me."

"My blessing truly, dear boy. Of approval it is less easy to speak with confidence. I am not sure that you are altogether fitted for the work which lies before you, even with six years of experience to guide you. You are going there because the need is the sorest, that I do not attempt to deny. Yet the devil is busy everywhere, even in such places as this. I have told you that my friend the Bishop has his eye on you for a living in this neighbourhood, soon to be vacant. I should have liked you for a neighbour, Cyril, and you would not have found your energies rust here."

He answered her affectionate glance by a pressure of the hand, but his words were eagerly spoken—

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"I could not take a country living in the prime of my manhood's strength. It may be something to look forward to when I have striven to bear the burden and heat of the day where the strife is keenest; but I could not take it now. Do not you yourself see that the young and strong and ardent are wanted most where the devil's power is greatest?"

"Yes," answered Lady Wylmington, in her very quiet way, after a pause of some considerable length. "But I do not think the devil's power *is* the strongest or most to be dreaded in the field that you have chosen, nor that the strife will be keenest there."

"You do not?"

"No. My deep sympathy is with the helpless poor in their need and want; but we know that little is asked of them to whom little is given, and that a just and merciful God will not visit upon them the lack of light which has never shone upon them. Infinitely more fearful will be the fate of those men and women who are deliberately trifling with the eternal verities of God, and substituting the idle speculations of man in their place. Often do I shudder at the unconscious blasphemy I see written in modern literature, when men speak of a 'higher Christianity' than that of Christ, and seek after forbidden things, and are led captive by theosophy, as they blindly term it, whilst turning from the only Wisdom of God which we are bidden to seek after. Ah, Cyril, is not this the beginning of the great delusion

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which a despised and neglected God has warned us He will send to those triflers who have turned from His appointed way? I long to see a man with a clarion voice—a man who will be listened to—a man who can meet them on their own ground and turn against them their own weapons —go forth to them. I had hoped, Cyril, to find in you such a messenger of the truth; for the peril and need of these deluded ones is to my thinking the most pressing of all, and the fast approaching doom the most terrible. But, dear boy, you have chosen differently, and I will say no more. The Spirit divides His gifts severally as He will. It is not for us to urge or plan beyond a certain point. I had thought of another career for you; but it is not, at least at present, to be. You are following the call you have received —no man can do more than that."

"Yes," said Cyril, with an earnest look on his face, "I believe I have received the call. Perhaps I have not thought as much as I should have done of those evils of which you speak, but my choice is made now. I could not change if I wished, and I do not think I do wish."

"Then we will agree that you are the right man in the right place at St. Chads," said Lady Wylmington; and having reached that point, Cyril, in answer to a few sympathetic questions, poured out the plans and projects with which his brain was teeming. He was to start with three curates. Two of them were chosen already. One had worked with him in his first parish. The rectory-

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house adjoining the church had fallen into disrepair, and Cyril had taken upon himself the work of restoration. He had put the whole place into the hands of an architect to be thoroughly done up, and he intended it for a house for himself and his colleagues, where they would live together in the midst of their work in brotherly unity.

"Until one of you marries," suggested Lady Wylmington, with a very slight smile.

"Until," answered Cyril, calmly meeting her glance with open candour. "But I think the danger of that contingency remote. I know the style of man I shall choose for the work."

"Then if there is to be no wife in the Brotherhood, may I have the satisfaction of selecting a capable housekeeper? For even the most inveterate misogynist is not above a well-cooked dinner."

"Do not call me that, please," answered Cyril, with the winning grace which sat quaintly upon the gentle austerity of manner habitual to him. "No one thinks more highly of womanhood than I do—and I have good reason. And as for a cook-housekeeper, I shall be most thankful if you will find me such a treasure. I shall want a good cook for my sick poor as well as for the Brotherhood."

"I will try to find you one, and you must try to keep her when found. Be considerate to her as well as to your sick, Cyril. Remember that the place will be a difficult one."

"I will try," he answered, "and when you are in

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town you will come and see me, and bring sunshine to her and to us alike? I shall not feel it is quite home until I have seen you sitting there."

"I am coming up to town in the course of a few weeks. I will come to see you whenever you wish. But you must write and invite me, or I should not be likely to find you in."

In the course of some five weeks the invitation came.

"Take a cab and come, and I will see you home afterwards. Your coachman would certainly turn up his nose at receiving orders to drive to my parish, and the contrast would be too sharply defined between your carefully-appointed carriage and my poor, struggling parishioners."

Already Cyril was possessed with a fatherly care for the people about him.

Nevertheless, it was in her own carriage that Lady Wylmington drove up to her grandson's clergy-house one bitter afternoon in November.

"My coachman is not accustomed to turn up his nose at any order of mine," she said, as she kissed Cyril in the narrow hall of his house, "least of all when it is my grandson I visit. Nor do I think it will hurt your poor people to know that somebody possessing a carriage cares a little for them and for their spiritual father. I have brought you some flowers from Monckton Abbey, and there are some grapes in the carriage for your sick. But the flowers are for *you*, my dear boy," and

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she placed the bouquet she was carrying in his hands, their eyes meeting across it.

The scent brought a strange waft of association over the sensitive mind of the young priest—all the happy days spent at Monckton Abbey, the grace, the beauty, the harmony of life which he had renounced—the atmosphere of peace and refinement and protecting, guiding love—just those elements which had exercised upon him so strong an influence from childhood upwards.

For a moment he could not speak, and Lady Wylmington passed on into his sitting-room in sympathetic silence, looking round with her keenly critical eyes as she took the seat offered her. The room was clean and fresh from the hands of the painters. The walls were grey, a bright fire shone in the grate, the furniture was of oak, simple and well-made. There was no carpet on the floor, but a rug lay in front of the fireplace; and above the mantelpiece hung a picture of the Crucifixion in an Oxford frame. On one side of the room was a book-case crammed with books of every description, and books lay also on the writing-table in the corner.

"How do you like it?" inquired Cyril, as he carefully placed his flowers in water.

"It is like you," answered Lady Wylmington; "ascetic, a little too cold and colourless, but all in keeping. It is a 'whole-hearted' room—like its owner. But I shall send you an easy-chair, and that picture wants a companion, Cyril."

"Does it?" he asked, with a loving look at the

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picture. "I don't know that I ever thought so. How?"

"I have not come to talk theology to-day," said Lady Wylmington, with her grave smile, "or perhaps I would remind you of the danger of stopping short at the Cross, and leaving your penitents there, instead of taking them on in spirit to the glorious hope of the Resurrection. Perhaps some day I shall find the companion-picture to embody my thoughts, and at least the easy-chair can be obtained speedily. You will condescend to use it, Cyril—for the sake of the donor?"

"Indeed I will. I gratefully accept your offer. But may I have it made to match the rest of my furniture?"

"So as to be fashionably *en suite*—or to insure a certain amount of ecclesiastical discomfort?" asked Lady Wylmington, with a gleam in her eyes which elicited instantly an answering spark from Cyril's.

"No—it shall be as luxuriously comfortable as ever you like to order it; but I want it made in the parish by my own people, as everything else in the house has been. If you could see how eager my poor parishioners are for work they cannot get, quietly starving—some amongst them at least—sooner than confess their bitter need, you would understand my feeling about it. The best of my people I can only help in this way."

"Very good, Cyril, I am glad to hear it. I like that spirit of independence, even though it may, in individual cases, be carried too far. But it is the

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right feeling. Yes, order your chair where you will, but I stipulate that it be a real *easy* chair, and not an ascetic make-believe. I trust you to see to this, and send the bill to me; and this leads up to another matter on which I wish to speak to you. Tell me, did you expect to see me come to you laden with flannel and baby-clothes and tinned soups?"

"I have ceased to expect anything where you are concerned, grandmother," he answered, touching her hand with the tips of his fingers, "for I have long ago discovered that it is always the unexpected that you do."

"Nevertheless, Cyril, I have large stores of flannel and all sorts of other things at home; and when you come across women who are desirous of work and are unable to get it—send them to me. I will pay their fares, and a cup of tea with my housekeeper will be a pleasant interlude in their lives. They will breathe purer air for a few hours, and if they come with two words in your handwriting as a credential, I will, if possible, see them myself, and try to put them in the way of employment. At any rate they shall take work away from my house, and the garments made by them shall be your property, to be given at your discretion in the parish. Probably soon you may have Sisters of Mercy working under you, with whom I can settle details. Meantime everything made of that sort will be left here, and you will gradually accumulate a store of clothing upon which to draw in times of sickness and urgent need. I think

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your own experience will tell you not to pauperize by undue giving. No, my boy, do not thank me. There is one sentence which shames us into an awed silence whenever we think upon these things. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren.' . . . Before those words we stand mute."

He bent his head in a voiceless assent, and after that no word of his gratitude passed his lips as Lady Wylmington spoke of a few simple and practical plans for helping on the work of the parish. It was understood between them without the medium of words.

The housekeeper brought in some tea for "her ladyship," her face beaming with pleasure at sight of her. Lady Wylmington spoke kindly to her, asked her several questions about herself and her surroundings, and noted with quick perception the shade of hesitancy and embarrassment in her manner, although her face was bright and beaming.

"Poor soul, she thinks I have been telling tales out of school," said Cyril, when she had gone. "She is really most good and willing, but she has her trials here, and perhaps I have sometimes failed in consideration for her; but it is so hard not to want to feed the multitude, and I have not been used to the consideration of domestic details."

"No; that is one of the drawbacks of a bachelor household," answered Lady Wylmington, smiling. "But Mrs. Upton does her best, I hope?"

"I am sure she does; but you see she remem-

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bers me when I was a boy, and thinks she has a right to scold me roundly on the strength of it; also that I know nothing about anything, which is humiliating to a man of my mature years. We occasionally have a battle royal—generally on a Monday, and she gives me notice. I was rather aghast the first time; but I gave her time to think it over, and by the evening she had reached the conclusion that 'for her ladyship's sake she couldn't let Master Cyril have nobody to look after him but one of them ignorant town girls, who didn't know a potato from a turnip, and can't so much as cook a chop without burning it outside and leaving it raw in the middle!' and so the peace is made, and now I am used to the little routine, and have ceased to take it seriously. We are capital friends really, and these periodic storms clear the air."

"And what is the periodic crime of Monday which leads to the storm?" asked Lady Wylmington, smiling. "Shall I hazard a guess that it is the Sunday hospitality that does it? Are you given to the entertaining of angels unawares? and perhaps Mrs. Upton does not recognize the angelic element?"

"I suppose that is it. I must tell her what 'her ladyship' says next time," answered Cyril, his face lighting. "It will make her laugh and do her good. Seriously, it is difficult not to be a little unreasonable on Sunday, when you know your Sunday-school teachers, your organist, and your assistants generally are all hungry, and do not all know where to turn for a good meal. I warned Mrs.

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Upton at starting, and in her heart the good old soul does not grudge them their meals; but it does make Sunday a hard day for her, and one of confusion. I own it frankly, and I must not grumble at periodic outbreaks of irritation."

"I am sure you will do your best to see both sides of the question, and give your sympathy even to an overworked cook—you would not be my own boy Cyril else," said Lady Wylmington, as she rose to go, and held out both her hands to him. "God bless you and be with you, my dear grandson, and may your home be a blessing to those around you! You have set yourself a hard task. I fear that even your strength and energy will be taxed by the battle before you. But if either body or mind cry out for rest in a fashion that will not be silenced, you know where to come to for the rest and care."

"Indeed I do!" he answered, his beautiful, earnest face quivering under the influence of many emotions. Grandmother and grandson kissed each other before quitting that quiet room; and then Cyril shook off his passing weakness, and insisted that Lady Wylmington should see a few of the other rooms before leaving.

"I am sorry my colleagues are all out," he said, as at last he took her to the carriage, loth even then to let her go; "I should have liked you to know them, and should have liked them to see you. They would have understood then why I talk so much about my grandmother. You will come another day and be introduced? They are such

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excellent fellows. The Brotherhood is quite ideally perfect still, you see."

She smiled, waved her hand to him, and the carriage drove off in the gathering gloom of the winter's afternoon.

That winter was a terrible one for London, and indeed for the whole country, and Cyril found himself engulfed by a perfect whirlpool of work. His parish had been terribly neglected; his church had fallen into disrepair, and it needed much personal effort before the funds necessary for its restoration were forthcoming. Worse still, the winter was exceptionally hard, and the struggle to keep starvation from the doors of his people was like a battle with some terrible material monster. Sad is it to read the many appeals in the columns of the daily paper for "help in a poor parish," but when the fight comes to our very doors, then we realize, as it is impossible to do till then, what awful depths of human suffering lie concealed beneath those simple words, and what is the nature of that grim fight.

To Cyril it was a thing so terrible that he denied himself all but the barest necessaries of life, and of these he sometimes had all too little. He organized schemes for work, he did everything that one man can accomplish—aided as he was by Lady Wylmington and other wealthy friends, to whom he appealed in his urgent need—to help without pauperizing his parish. But again and again the question would arise within him, "What is one amongst so many?" and in spite of all

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resolves of prudence he often brought home starving, dripping, miserable wretches, to be warmed and fed in his house, trusting and hoping thus to bring them under some sort of influence for good—for these wretched outcasts were received by him and his helpers regardless of faith or creed or nationality—only to learn time after time the bitter lesson, that there was a hopeless apathy about religion harder to overcome than open opposition.

Lent came with its varied duties and exercises. Cyril spared himself none of these; and the increased strain told heavily upon him. But with the energy and obstinacy of a strong man who has had small experience of illness hitherto, he disregarded warnings, smiled at the brotherly entreaties of his colleagues, and went his way with unrelaxing energy. Yet he was often terribly sick at heart, worn-out in mind and body, inclined even to long for the release of death; and it was small wonder that Easter week found him looking white and wan and shaken—a shadow of his former self, and that the face he raised from the crossed arms on which he had been resting it, at the sound of the bell of St. Chads, should be lined with suffering and care, sad and strange to see in the countenance of so young a man.

"Oh, that bell!" he murmured, with a look of physical distress, as he put up his hand to his throbbing brow. That terrible throbbing pain in his temples was a thing he had recently come to look upon with dread. Hitherto he had passed through life without knowing much of physical

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pain. Now he began to know what this was like, and how frightfully disabling it could become.

But he rose all the same and crossed the room with cautious steps, for every movement increased the pain, till as he stepped out into the street he felt he could hardly bear the glare of the April sunshine, or the increased clangour of the bells. Two women were quarrelling upon the church steps, surrounded by a ring of open-mouthed and grinning children. But at the approach of the young priest the women parted and fled, each her own way, and the children looked up at him with another sort of smile on their faces. Cyril tried to smile back, for every child in his parish was a sacred charge to him—but his lips felt stiff and dry. He was intensely relieved not to have to speak to the women, for he felt he had no words in which to address them.

It was the evening of Easter Tuesday, but the congregation comprised only a palsied woman, a blind man led by his dog, and two or three of the children who had followed Cyril into the church. The senior curate was there, and he and Cyril divided the service in the usual way. But all the while the shooting pain in his temples increased, until he became so blinded that he had to trust to his memory for his share of the service. Automatically he repeated the last prayers and gave the benediction; but after that he remembered no more till he found himself in the vestry, lying back in an arm-chair, whilst Mr. Bartlett, his senior curate, was holding a glass of water to his lips.

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He was helped home soon afterwards by the Brotherhood, who all loved him as though he were in truth their elder brother; but when rest in a darkened room had modified the pain in his head, Cyril would have made light of the whole incident.

"I have never been subject to headaches," he said. "I think I did not know what was the matter. I will give in sooner next time."

"That was no common headache," said Mr. Bartlett gravely. "You must take a holiday, Benson."

"So I will in the autumn, when my turn comes."

"Where is Lady Wylmington?" asked another of the Brotherhood.

"Out of our reach, at any rate," smiled Cyril. "She was sent for to Monckton Abbey before Christmas, and has not been able to get to Park Lane since. Perhaps she may come up later on, but the London season has only modified attractions for her."

"If she were in Park Lane you should go to her to-night," remarked the valiant youngest brother. "I would haul you there by the scruff of your neck, failing a more respectable method."

"If she were there, I think I would go to her in a less remarkable way," answered Cyril. "I mean to give myself one day off to-morrow."

"Humph!" growled Mr. Bartlett. "One day off, indeed!" and he took his hat and went out.

Cyril closed his eyes wearily, thinking with a sort of sick longing of the long, cool glades, the stately trees, the quaint old pleasaunces surround-

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ing his grandmother's house; the lofty panelled rooms, the abiding sense of rest and peace and harmony that he always felt at Monckton Abbey.

He was aroused by the pressure of cool, strong fingers upon his wrist, and opened his languid eyes to find that the last of the spring daylight had faded from the room, which was lighted now only by a pair of tall candles, so placed as to throw their light upon his face, as he lay back in the arm-chair of his grandmother's giving. Mr. Bartlett stood with his face to the fire-place, looking anxiously at him, and in another chair at his side sat Dr. Trevor, regarding him with equal steadfastness.

Dr. Trevor was a young Cornishman of about Cyril's own age, a man of great talent, some wealth, and boundless energy, who had come down to East London in defiance of the advice of friends, actuated very much by the same motives as the young priest. These two had stood beside too many death-beds, had fought shoulder to shoulder too many grim battles with the devil's handiwork, not to be fast friends by this time; yet Cyril's first instinctive movement was to pull away his hand from beneath those professional fingers, and ask impatiently, almost irritably—

"What are you doing here, Trevor, and who asked you to——?"

"Interfere," concluded the doctor, quietly taking the words out of Cyril's mouth. "I came because I was wanted—not by yourself, of course. That goes without saying; but by your colleagues, who

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have a right to ask that you do not fall ill upon their hands as you threatened to do to-day."

"Bartlett has been telling tales," muttered Cyril, flashing anything but a grateful look at his senior curate.

"Yes, luckily for you all, one of your number has some common sense," answered Dr. Trevor, with that lighting of the eyes which was in the main his fashion of smiling. "Come, Benson, don't cut up rough. Don't you know me well enough by this time, my dear fellow, to feel confidence that I will not stand in the way of your work willingly? Nay, that if I do interfere with you in the present, it is only that we may have you fit to work again sooner than you will be if you follow your own methods too long."

The irritation and indignation faded from Cyril's face, and his rare, sweet smile lighted it.

"Forgive me if I was a bear just now, Trevor. I think I do not quite know how to treat a doctor, never having had need of him heretofore. But indeed I do not think there is much amiss with me. Every one is liable to an accidental headache."

"True; but every one has not been expending Nature's stock of strength at the rate you have been doing these past months. I have warned you before, Benson—too many services, an idea that you can work by day when you have been up all night without feeling it, a lack of fresh air and restful exercise, too little to eat all through Lent, and I dare say only water to drink, and that

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probably not too pure. You are not made of cast-iron, you clergy, though you seem to think you are. You have stood it wonderfully all this while; you have saved everybody but yourself; and now Mother Nature is speaking loud enough to make herself heard, and you must listen to her counsel."

"And what is that counsel?"

"It is very simple and very easily followed. One month's rest in some quiet place, away from your present work. Remember, Benson, the strain is lessening. With spring comes always a rebound. Men get work, sickness and suffering of a certain kind diminish with the advance of the warm weather. You can really be spared now, and if you will take a month at once, it will save you from perhaps the necessity of leaving us for six later on; and we cannot spare you for the longer time, my dear fellow, we really cannot; so for our sakes, you must go now."

"If I could be sure it was the right thing to do," hesitated Cyril, putting his hand to his throbbing brow.

"If you cannot be sure, others can. Tell me, Benson, when did you take your last holiday?"

"It was some time ago," admitted Cyril. "I have always been the strongest of my party. I did not want the rest some men did, and I thought I should get a long holiday when I left my last curacy; but there was so much waiting to be done here when I was instituted, that I could not manage it. I came straight from there, and began work here without a break."

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"Exactly what I thought, and a sound argument for your taking your holiday early this year. Be reasonable and considerate, Benson, and go at once; and come back fit for the strife and the battle. Where can you go to ensure perfect rest, and where you will have somebody to look after you a little?—for you may need it, little as you are disposed to think so."

A faint smile curved Cyril's lips, and a look of relaxation came over the worn features.

"There is no difficulty there. My grandmother, of whom you have heard me speak, will take me in. Monckton Abbey is my ideal of a home of rest, and I shall not lack for care there."

"The very thing," said Dr. Trevor heartily. "Lucky fellow to have such an asylum. Telegraph first thing to-morrow that you are coming, and be off if possible by noon."

It was quick work, but as Cyril felt, if he was to go, the sooner he was off the sooner he would be back at his post. By eight o'clock the following day he had wired to Lady Wylmington, and before his breakfast was over came the reply—

"Come to-day. Will meet six o'clock train at Taunton."

And Cyril went.

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CHAPTER II

AN IRISH GIRL'S DIARY

Monckton Court, Somersetshire,
Monday, April 25, 18—

I, SYLVIA O'CONNOR, have never kept a diary before, nor do I know how long the sudden freak will last; but life is so delightful just now, that I feel as if I must keep some account of it. I want to have some written record of my doings to refer to when mother and father come home from India. It seems so hard that I should not have seen mother since I was thirteen, and that it was not possible for me to wait to be presented and have the joy of my first season in London under her wing; but here was I, a grown-up girl of eighteen, altogether too old to be kept at school any longer, and my aunt, Mrs. Carick Carew, offered me a home till mother's return next spring, and as it was quite impossible to keep me shut up like a school-room miss, they thought it best

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to let her bring me out. Of course it is what every girl looks forward to and dreams of, from the moment she enters her teens, unless she is stupid and prosaic. I think and hope that I am neither! People who delight in turning out the disagreeable side of life say that anticipation surpasses reality. As far as I know this is a dreary and untrue axiom. I always find everything much nicer than I think it will be. When I spent the winter abroad three years ago, with this same Aunt Annie, no words can express the joy I got out of it; and now that I have just begun to realize what it is to be "out," I find it far surpasses my wildest dreams. There is a curious difference between being "in" and "out." Last year, when I spent my holidays here, I was a person of no importance. "My dear, just run and tell the gardener to cut some more roses," or "This afternoon I am going to tea with Lady Wylmington. You'll amuse yourself till I come back. By the way, have you practised to-day?" I was "in" then, but now I am "out," and the tone is altered. "Sylvia, my love, will you kindly ring the bell?" or, "We are going to a tennis-party at the Hamiltons' this afternoon. I am afraid you'll be a trifle bored after London. There are so few young men in this neighbourhood. However, your Cousin Jem is going, and he will do his best to make you happy."

It is very queer Cousin Jem was never told off to make me happy last year. We played tennis and rode together, and sparred a good

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deal. I simply quarrelled with Jem to get a little fun out of life, for to tell the truth (and one may speak the truth to oneself) Jem is doubtless excellent, but he is atrociously dull. He will take a whole hour to describe a run with the fox-hounds, and another to descant on a match at Lord's cricket-ground. He has no sense of humour. He is a dear, kind, good-hearted English country gentleman; he is far too English. I am so thankful that father is an Irishman, and I am intensely Irish in nature, I believe. At present I have been away from Ireland because father and mother have been constantly on the move with their regiment, but when they come home we are to go and live on our Irish estate. Father will retire from the army because his health has given way in India. But I was talking of poor old Jem. He is so ugly. It is a great pity everybody cannot be nice to look at. Mother is lovely, and father is very handsome, and Aunt Annie is handsome too. I suppose Jem's father must have been a fright. I never saw him. He died years ago, so Jem is master down here. Jem has red hair, and a red face, and a red moustache. He is tall and powerfully made. He looks his best on horseback. He and I like totally opposite things. It was to please him that we came down here for Easter; but we are going back for the season. We shall be only here for a few weeks. I did feel it rather hard to leave London just now. I meant to have begun my diary then, to write down the delights

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of every day. Of course we were not half so gay as we shall be later on, because it was Lent; but there was plenty going on, and Aunt Annie took me to hear some of the celebrated preachers on Sundays. I suppose I shall like sermons later on; I don't care much about them now. The only sermon I ever listened to was preached by a strange clergyman in our own church one Sunday afternoon, when I was there by myself. It made me so uncomfortable. "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." It was all about giving up. I believe that man thought that, to be good, one should give up everything one likes best; and it struck me that he was prepared to practise what he preached. He looked rather like what one imagines an Apostle might be, and had dark, searching eyes that seemed to read one's very soul. But what struck me most of all was his earnestness. There was something awful in it. It made me uneasy. I asked the verger who the preacher was after service, and he said it was a Mr. Benson, who came from the East End. I was to be presented that week, and when I was dressed in my lovely dress, with my bouquet and everything about me that money could buy, the thought suddenly crossed my mind what would Mr. Benson say to it all? But *why* should one give up everything that is pleasant? Aunt Annie would simply have thought me mad if I had said, "I cannot go to court; I will give it up."

What object would there be in it? Nobody would be the better for it, so I just put it all

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aside and enjoyed the ceremony to my heart's content. It was lovely to see the Queen, and I did so long to tell her that although I was an Irish girl I was not a Home Ruler. I want Ireland to be governed by her always. I have thought since then that perhaps Mr. Benson meant that if we were happy ourselves we might try to make others happy. The only way I can make others happy is by being pleasant to them. I cannot bear people to be cross to me. I know being pleasant is not giving up anything; but of course I do want every one to be as happy as I am. By the way, I was nearer being cross a day or two after I was presented than I ever was in my life before. A Colonel Jenkins came to the "train-tea," *i.e.* the tea that Aunt Annie gave to her particular friends on our return from the Drawing Room, so that they might see our pretty dresses. I am sure I don't know why Colonel Jenkins was invited. I had only seen him three times before, and thought him rather a boring old man, much given to compliments. Two days after the train-tea he called on Aunt Annie *in the morning*, and asked her leave to propose to me. I think she was telling him that it would not be any good for him to see me, when I went unexpectedly into the room, and then it all came out. I was so taken aback that at first I could not answer at all. Finally I said—

"Why, I know nothing about you. I never saw you till a week ago; and please, I would rather you never spoke about it again."

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Then I left the room in a rage. Aunt Annie lectured me gravely afterwards, and said the poor man meant no harm.

"Harm!" I cried. "He is older than father, and not half as delightful or handsome."

"My dear," Aunt Annie answered, in a huff, "he is no bad match for any girl, even if she is good-looking and has a fortune. He is well connected, very well off, and would simply idolize you. However, it is perhaps better that you should wait for some one a little nearer your own age."

This was too much.

"I shall wait until some one wants to marry me whom I like well enough to marry," I cried hotly; "and that I hope will not be for years and years yet. Why, I have only just come out of the school-room, and I want to be happy my own way."

"My dear, you talk like a silly, impulsive child," said my aunt coldly. "We will drop the subject."

After all, I thought that night when I went to bed, it does not do to be always too pleasant. That is the only serious tiff I have had with Aunt Annie. What a tremendous diary for one day! If I go on like this, I shall want a chest to keep it in. The truth is, I had nothing to do this morning. Jem asked me to ride round the Home Farm with him; but I thought it would be rather dull, so I said I had some writing to do, and—my pen has run away with me.

Thursday, April 28.—I am afraid my diary

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will take more the form of a running commentary on my life than anything very orderly, although I suppose the word diary means something you write every day. Personally anything very regular bores me. I do not like to get up at the same time every day, or go to bed at any regular time. It all depends upon what comes along. Some days I am up with the lark, and sometimes I lie in bed till nine o'clock. In the country it is considered rather a sin to be late down in the morning. In London you can do as you like. Aunt Annie says, "My dear, it is very important in the country that the household should keep regular and early hours."

What puzzles me is having so many laws for things, a different law for each place. This morning was one of my early days. The sun shone so brightly in at my window, and the green was so lovely outside, that it struck me how delicious it would be to go into the woods and find some primroses and hear the cuckoo. So out I jumped, dressed as quickly as I could in a serge gown, waylaid the maid and got some tea, and then away to the woods. I should need to be a painter to describe the beauty of it all. I felt so good being out so early. It was nearly as hot as summer. The primroses carpeted the woods, and here and there the blue-bells were showing flower. It was good to be alive on such a day, and I longed for some one to share the beauty of it all. Suddenly from afar I heard the tower clock from the Court chime nine, and here was I at least a

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mile away from home. Nine o'clock was the breakfast hour. I knew that if I could only climb the hedge and get into a field-path I could lessen the distance by half. My hands were crammed with flowers and I had a sunshade to hold, but still I felt I must try it. I had been late, very late, for three days running, and Aunt Annie would think me eccentric if I were very late again, because I had chosen to wander miles before breakfast. There was nothing for it but to try and scale the hedge. For once I sighed for Jem; he would have lifted me over as easily as if I were a puppy. As it was, I began slowly and painfully to clamber through the hedge. It hurt me dreadfully, and, worst of all, I knew it was hurting my boots. I knew they were being scratched all over, and they were such nice ones! I was getting cross and hot. I dropped my sunshade into the ditch on the further side, and I was so stuck fast in the middle that I could not get backwards nor forwards. "Oh, if *only* some one would come to help me," I cried impatiently, and as I spoke I saw the top of a clergyman's hat appearing on the other side of the hedge. I felt a trifle foolish. "I hope he won't see me," I thought, trying desperately to release myself and withdraw into the wood. The effort was unsuccessful, and there lay my sunshade across the ditch, an outward and visible token of my presence. The hat drew nearer, and its owner stopped short before my sunshade and picked it up. Then he looked about him to see where it had dropped from and discovered me, caught like

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a ram in the thicket. In an instant I recognized the preacher of that wonderful sermon, and I gave a slight gasp of astonishment.

"You seem in difficulties. Will you allow me to help you?" said the clergyman with grave politeness, lifting his hat.

"Difficulties!" I laughed. "I am stuck fast in this horrible hedge and cannot stir, and I am late for breakfast, and—oh! I am so hungry."

He did not answer me, but began at once to disentangle my dress. He did it as deftly and quickly as a woman, but, unlike a woman, was apparently unconscious of the fact that he was tearing his hands with the thorns.

"Take care," I said, "your hands are bleeding."

"Now then, place your foot here, and the other one so," he said, directing my steps, but disregarding my remark. "There! you are free, I think. Can you jump the ditch, or shall I lift you across?"

I hesitated. The ditch was wide, and I was giddy rather from my long morning's walk. I was not left long in indecision, for in a moment I found myself lifted by strong arms and put down on the other side of the ditch with as scant ceremony as if I had been a sack of flour.

"I was going to jump," I said, a trifle injured.

"You looked rather as if you were going to faint," said the athletic parson, with a touch of scorn in his voice. "If I can be of no further service, good-morning," and he turned to go.

"I have never thanked you," I said hurriedly; "but I assure you I never faint—never!"

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"Can you jump the ditch, or shall I lift you across?"—p. 52.

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"I am sorry to have annoyed you, and glad to have helped you," answered this man of few words. "I am afraid I must hurry back to the Abbey, where I am staying. I am late."

"Oh, I am staying at the Court," I said; "we shall probably meet again, and, if we do, you will possibly tell me what you meant by that sermon." I can't think what made me say it.

"Forgive me," rejoined the clergyman, slowly turning towards me. "I can scarcely tell to what sermon you allude, can I?"

He was evidently annoyed, and I felt my last remark had been in the worst possible taste. I felt rather disconcerted. He stood gravely scanning my face waiting for an answer, and I felt getting hot all over under the severe scrutiny. I plunged on.

"It was a very queer sermon you preached one Sunday in Lent, in St. Mark's, Kensington. I did not understand it, nor like it; at least—at least—I disagreed with it, but I listened to it."

A low laugh broke from my companion.

"The criticism is a severe one. I am afraid it was a palpably bad sermon. It apparently would take a long time to explain. I am not good at preaching to rich people, or indeed to any class." He spoke sadly.

I bowed, and without another word turned to go home. I called myself bad names all the way back. I felt that with my usual impulsiveness I had made myself thoroughly ridiculous. However, nobody should know what silly things I had said.

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I believe any girl would rather *do* a silly thing than say one. I ran into the breakfast-room with the utmost sang-froid.

"My dear child, I thought you must have eloped," said Aunt Annie, looking at me a little severely over the tea-pot. "You were last seen soon after seven making for the woods, and now it is half-past nine."

"Yes, Aunt Annie, I have been having a perfectly lovely time until the last hour, when I got stuck in a hedge, and was got out alive with great difficulty and much shedding of blood, by a parson. Would it be wrong to call him a hedge-parson?" I was determined to carry the matter with a high hand.

"Did you *know* the parson, as you call him?" asked Aunt Annie.

"No," I said hesitatingly, "I never met him before."

I certainly was not going to let out that I had heard him preach and asked his name afterwards. Fancy how Jem would laugh at my getting excited over a sermon.

"You had no business to go and stick yourself in the middle of a hedge," grumbled Jem, stopping midway in carving himself a large plate of ham.

"I did not mean to do it, Jem, I assure you; and almost for the first time in my life I sighed for you, but after all the parson did just as well."

I really could not allow Jem to set up as a mentor.

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"Well, you need not be so down upon a fellow," Jem retorted.

Aunt Annie hastened to heal the breach.

"There, my dear, Sylvia did not mean it. She is quite tired out. Jump up and get her something to eat;" and Aunt Annie handed me my coffee.

Jem crowded me with a thousand clumsy attentions, regarding my appetite as insatiable.

"Thank you," I said at last, "I shall never be hungry again. I will make you a buttonhole after breakfast, as a reward, something simple to suit the hour and the country. Shall it be a primrose as a token of your conservatism?" and I ran off to seek for my basket in the hall. I was busy tying up a bunch, and was unconsciously quoting.

> "A primrose on the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him
> And it was nothing more—"

The quotation remained unfinished.

"What *are* you talking about, Sylvia?" said Jem, who had followed me.

"Only quoting a very pretty little piece of poetry all about a primrose, that seemed appropriate to the occasion. I don't think you would understand it, Jem, nor care for it."

"Poetry is all stuff," muttered Jem moodily.

"Yet there is something rather winning, not to say poetical, about your buttonhole," I said, producing a pin to fasten it in position.

Jem is such a good-natured old person that I

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can always bring him back to his allegiance in his sulkiest mood.

So the episode of the hedge ended.

Monday, May 2.—We are nothing down here if not rural; rural in our tastes and rural in our pleasures. Now to-day, for example, is May Day; not in reality, but yesterday, being Sunday, the festivities suitable for the first of May had to be put off to a more convenient season—*i. e.* to-day. Lady Wylmington at the Abbey, who owns all the land Jem does not, insists, mildly but firmly, on keeping up English manners and customs (so Aunt Annie says), and the villagers hold high festival accordingly on May Day at my lady's expense. Little girls come round quite early in the morning with nosegays and garlands, and sing very nice little songs. They don't come decked out in tawdry ribbons, but just in their village dress. Certainly Lady Wylmington manages to keep them simple and natural. I was flying for my purse, when Aunt Annie stopped me—

"My dear," she said, "Lady Wylmington would be so distressed if you paid them. They do it for love."

Now this is quite a new trait in the English character. Mother says only Irish people do things for love. They are good lovers, and, I am afraid, worse haters, or else they would not be always shooting at people from behind hedges, but it is only the bad ones who do that.

Yesterday I saw my rescuer, Mr. Benson. The two big families down here divide the chancel

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seats between them, quite ousting the lawful owners thereof, the choir and the Rectory people. The Rector's daughters, sweet-faced, fresh-coloured girls, with fair hair and white gowns, sit in the aisle! I felt ashamed of my high position, and told Aunt Annie so, and she said it was ridiculous nonsense; she did so hope I was not going to imbibe "socialistic notions." I have put down the phrase for future consideration, as I don't at present see what she is after. The first person I set eyes on after I got into my seat was Mr. Benson. I felt inclined to give him a little nod of recognition, as much as to say "Here we are again," but happily the man and the place overawed me.

I don't think going to a London church ever does me a scrap of good, but the little quaint country church and the simple village service here sobers me, and I am filled with a vague longing to be something different from what I am. Old Lady Wylmington, sitting by her guest with her handsome face bent over her Prayer-book, and her lips moving in prayer, touches one's better nature. With Aunt Annie, going to church is so clearly a matter of duty. I am sure some people possess a magnetic influence over one. I think Mr. Benson does over me. His is a face one could never forget. He is simply, unconsciously, absorbed in devotion.

After church we stood chatting with the Rector's daughters outside the church door, and he and Lady Wylmington passed by, but they did not stop to speak to us. I felt rather vexed. Most

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people I come across seem glad to meet me again. I frankly own I love popularity.

Tuesday, May 3.—Yesterday afternoon proved quite an exciting time for the country. Aunt Annie proposed at lunch that we should drive down to the Abbey and see the village festivities which were to be held in the park. I jumped at the notion, as it was an entirely novel experience; but Jem begged to be excused. It would be "awfully slow."

"I believe Sylvia only wants to go to be introduced to that parson fellow," he added suspiciously.

"I confess that in a neighbourhood where men are few and far between, even parsons have their value, and this one is an interesting specimen," I answered, with a frankness that disarmed criticism.

"I don't think Lady Wylmington's grandson will fall a ready captive to your bow and spear," said Aunt Annie, a little sharply. "I hear that he is particularly strong on the celibacy of the clergy."

"I thought he looked rather a fool," said Jem, with lofty superiority.

"But I don't want him for a captive, Aunt Annie," I retorted, ignoring Jem's remark. "I only want some one to talk to who will be civil and amusing. Jem has been neither to-day, and I feel I need change of air, and a little pleasant society. I have not seen you all the morning, so it will be perfectly delightful to have a drive with

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you first, and to wind up with the sports at the Abbey."

The compliment to Aunt Annie softened the implied rebuke to Jem, so we presently started together. Aunt Annie was in a gracious mood, complimented me on my clothes, and said I always looked "rightly dressed" wherever I was, which pleased me from her, as she is critical to a fault. We reached the Abbey about four. We did not drive up to the house, which stands beautifully about a mile from the road, but we made at once for the tents and Maypole, which were set up just outside the garden in the park. Groups of gaily-dressed villagers stood about, and bursts of laughter and cheers broke from them as men and boys tried, successfully or unsuccessfully, to swarm the Maypole, and win the various prizes that hung temptingly from the top. The children were being entertained by games which were vigorously shared by the Rector's daughters. The eldest of them, Edith Wingfield by name, made a dead set for me the moment I alighted from the carriage. Her face was scarlet, her hair dishevelled, and she was breathless, but she looked so animated.

"Oh, Miss O'Connor, will you please come *at once* and play 'gap'? We want another lady dreadfully. They are killing us three girls."

The invitation alarmed me.

"But I don't know 'gap,'" I said, with a laugh.

"It is no great intellectual effort," said Miss Wingfield gaily. "Come!" and I went.

"Gap" I found to be a sort of superior drop-

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handkerchief, or "kiss-in-the-ring," only there was no handkerchief and no kissing. Possibly this is an Irish way of stating things. A big ring of girls is formed, one runs round and gives a slap on the back to whomever she chooses; the person so unpleasantly roused leaves a gap in the ring, and runs as fast as her legs can carry her in the opposite direction to her assailant, and of course tries to get back to her place before the other one who has had the start of her gets to it. To forfeit your place means that you in your turn must go and slap some one *else* on the back, which I did not wish to do. Therefore I put my whole heart and soul into that terrible game. I played it with deadly earnestness. I would keep my place in that ring, or die in the process. I forgot everything else in the effort. I never thought I could run half as fast. I was at my last gasp, running round for my life, when I suddenly cannoned against a black body that crossed my path unexpectedly. Only by a great effort did I recover my balance, and save myself from stretching my length on the ground.

"I am dreadfully sorry. I am afraid I was clumsy. Have I hurt you?"

There was real concern in the voice, and the speaker was Mr. Benson.

I was far too breathless to speak. I leaned against a tree, grasped helplessly at my hat which I knew was awry, and shook my head protestingly.

"What may I do to atone for my awkwardness? Shall I get you some tea? We seem bound to

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meet each other under peculiar circumstances, Miss ——," and he paused, at a loss for my name.

"O'Connor," I said, recovering my voice.

"Ah, yes. Mrs. Carew had kindly promised to introduce me to you, only she could not see you anywhere a few minutes ago. After the frantic energy with which you have played that game, I am sure you need refreshment. Will you come with me to the tent, or may I bring you some here?"

"I will come in a minute when I have got back my breath. How pretty all this is. I have never seen anything like it before."

"You don't live here, I think?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"No, I am a waif and stray till father and mother come home from India. My head-quarters are with my aunt, Mrs. Carew."

"She is not down here for long now, my grandmother tells me."

"Oh no," I broke in eagerly, "I hope not. We ought to be back in London now."

"Has London so great a charm for you?"

"I think it the most delightful place in the world."

"And I think it the most interesting," said my companion, more to himself than to me.

"Is it London sights that interest you, or London society?" I asked hesitatingly.

"London sights and London society too," he said. "I could show you sights and people too

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in my parish that would give you food for thought for weeks."

I shivered involuntarily.

"But the sights might be sad, and the people dirty and wicked," I added under my breath.

"Yes," he said, suddenly turning his kindling eyes towards me; "but must it always be that what is lovely and beautiful in this world shrinks from contact with what is unlovely and repulsive? I would give pounds to transport a few hundreds of my poor people down here to-night and let them have one glimpse of this place to-night in its divine beauty."

"So would I," I cried; "and if money could help to bring them, I would give that. I have money enough to help, but I don't want to see many poor people in London wretched for want of things I could not give. I am so happy, I want every one to be happy; but to look at misery and feel helpless to relieve it—ah no! that would be too sad. I don't know what you think people ought to do. There must be rich and poor as long as the world lasts. It is not my fault that I am rich, and I am sure it is not wrong to be happy."

I believe there were tears in my eyes. Mr. Benson turned quickly and looked at me.

"It is certainly wrong in me to half kill you by tumbling against you and then land you in an argument over life's social problems," he answered, with a bright, quick smile. "Are you rested? Will you come to the tent now? and I really must rescue Miss Wingfield from these children. Did

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you ever see any one work harder than she does over making them happy? She is so utterly unselfish."

I felt instinctively that if Miss Wingfield had heard Mr. Benson's sermon she would have understood what it meant. We left directly after tea.

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CHAPTER III

EXTRACTS FROM LADY WYLMINGTON'S NOTE-BOOK

April 22, 18—.

CYRIL'S telegram has not surprised me. I felt sure from the first that he had undertaken a task beyond his strength, and that with his finely-strung temperament he could not hope to escape with impunity. He is too fine a weapon for the work he has to do at St. Chads. He has indeed all the single-minded devotion, the deep enthusiasm, the untiring energy which such a work requires; but his vivid powers of imagination, and his keen insight and sympathy are two-edged weapons, and cut home into his very soul. Each individual amongst his miserable parishioners feels his own personal sense of wretchedness and want; but Cyril, in a sense, bears the burden of them all. It is too much for any man. His ardent, sensitive nature is becoming crushed beneath the load he has taken upon him-

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self. I have seen a tone of despondency and weariness creeping into his letters which has prepared me for a break-down. With his temperament this was inevitable sooner or later, and I suspect that the Lenten fast has brought it to pass sooner than might otherwise have been the case.

April 25.—My poor boy has come—has been two or three days with me. I was shocked at his appearance when first he arrived. He was terribly changed, looking so thin and gaunt and wasted, that the tears came into my eyes at sight of him. He was so prostrated by the journey, that the first evening he could only lie on the sofa in my panelled room with wet cloths on his head, and the light shut out till the sun was quite down. But the perfect rest and quietude of these past three days have done much to restore him. He has had no recurrence of the violent headache—a symptom which I do not at all like,—and though wan and languid and strangely willing to do nothing from morning till night (a new feature indeed in Cyril), he is getting to look less like a shadow, and sometimes the old smile and sparkle come back and make him ten years younger at once.

He shows his weariness and mental strain chiefly by his inability to think and speak of anything but his parish. I want to see him put his cares aside for a time, but at present the mind has not the elasticity to turn back upon anything else, and I must perforce let him talk even of his troubles and worries. Perhaps the old habit of coming to me with his confidences is in part to account for this;

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and it is very sweet to me to feel that during these six years, when we have not seen so very much of each other, he has not lost the old boyish impulses of affectionate frankness, and that he still talks to me from the depth of his heart. I wish I had not been called away from London so early this year. I had purposed spending Christmas in Park Lane, and staying perhaps till February, mainly on Cyril's account. I could perhaps have watched over his health in some sort, and devised a few days' relaxation for him as occasion might serve. But circumstances recalled me to the Abbey, and I have been unable to return to town. Now, however, that I have Cyril here, perhaps we may set matters to rights with him.

His load is indeed a heavy one, and must remain so, do what he and others will in the cause. He has worked like a giant, and I am proud of my boy, his self-devotion, his untiring zeal, his absolute unselfishness, and the true humility which is best expressed in our Lord's own words—"We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do." I verily believe Cyril looks upon himself as a very unprofitable servant.

April 27.—Cyril is better. He begins to look more like himself, to enjoy walking, and to sleep unbrokenly at night. Monckton Abbey is "throwing its spell upon him," as he puts it. He has hardly spoken of his parish for twenty-four hours. I look upon that as a very good sign.

Yesterday Edith Wingfield came to luncheon and stayed through the afternoon, as she often

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does. Cyril knows very little of the Wingfields, as they were not here when he was much with me. Edith knows much about him, and is prepared, I can see, to make a hero and saint of him. Cyril has the face to attract an earnest and imaginative girl, and the two got on very well together. I never saw Edith more bright and eager and interested than in hearing him tell of his London work; and he talked of it in a more hearty and healthy way than heretofore, the sense of despondency giving way before her bright, keen enthusiasm. She did him good, and I think he fascinated her greatly. I hope she will not think *too* much about my young St. George, for at present no monk could be more wedded to celibacy than he; and I do not want a shadow cast over Edith's bright, useful life. Not that a little healthy admiration, or even a little imaginary idealism hurts a girl, if it does not go too far.

I could wish that Cyril would see things differently on that point, that he would marry a loving woman who would look after him and make his home-life sweet and happy, without trying to rule his parish for him. Edith would not do. She would make an excellent deaconess, or Sister of Mercy, and I should like to see her in such congenial work. But she would never be content with a home sphere—she would want to be in the thick of the fray all through, and in her sympathy for her husband's labours she would try to do it for him and with him, not keeping her own place, but taking up pastoral work which

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should belong to the ordained pastor alone. And that would not suit Cyril. He has seen something too much of "parishes ruled by women," as he has loftily expressed it; and I think that it is this abuse which has given him an unconscious bent towards celibacy. But his loving nature will never be truly satisfied without some one to love as a man can only love his wife; and how truly and nobly and with what singleness of heart Cyril *could* love, I think I know as well as any one ever will save his future wife!

We have been talking of the May Day festivities that always take place here, and Cyril has been stirred to animation in discussing details for the accommodation of old folk and the entertainment of young ones. It has always been a tradition at Monckton Abbey to hold high revel on May Day, and although, for my own part, I think that it is rather a mistake to try and galvanize into life those old-world revels that were once the spontaneous expression of the feelings of the people, I shall at least change nothing during my lifetime of the order dear to my husband's heart. I hope that the people enjoy it—in fine weather I think they certainly do; and this year we have the promise of unwonted warmth and brightness. For Cyril's sake I am glad it should be, for it has awakened childish memories within him, and helped more than anything else to drive away the look of care and oppression which was so painfully apparent at first.

April 28.—Cyril is progressing. He got up

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early and had a morning walk before breakfast to-day, and came home looking quite animated, and with the first flush of colour in his cheeks that I have seen.

"I have had an adventure," he said, as he sat down to breakfast, "or I should have been in time for prayers. I helped a young lady out of a quick-set hedge into which she had recklessly thrust herself; and in return she asked me to explain an incomprehensible sermon I had once delivered in her hearing! What do you think of that for a morning's diversion in the wilds of Somerset?"

"And you, I suppose, looked as grave as a judge, and snubbed her with calm severity. Probably you sent her off shaking in her shoes, and ready to bite her tongue out at her impulsive curiosity?"

"On the contrary, I think she went away far more composedly than I did. It was I who was shaking in my shoes at having laid sacrilegious masculine hands on anything so dainty and pretty."

"Who was this strange being?"

"That is just the question I was going to ask of you. I can't tell you what she was like, except that she was wonderfully pretty. But she said she was staying at the Court, so I thought you would probably know her name."

"At the Court? Oh, then it must be Sylvia O'Connor, Mrs. Carew's niece. Yes, she is a very pretty creature, though when I saw her last she was not out, wore short frocks, and let her hair

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tumble down her back like a golden fleece. I suppose she came for another visit when Mrs. Carew returned. Ah yes, I remember hearing that her aunt was to bring her out. I think I saw her name amongst those of the *débutantes* presented at the last Drawing Room."

His face fell the least little bit in the world.

"Oh, then she is a regular society young lady, is she?"

"I hardly know enough of her to ticket her like that. But if she were, Cyril, would she be any the worse for it—necessarily?"

He looked up at me, and the old sweet look came into his eyes—the look which from his boyhood I have loved to see when his deeper and nobler feelings were stirred.

"I stand rebuked," he answered gently. "No, not of *necessity*, I admit. Have I not a living example before me that women, at least, have the God-given faculty of being in, without being of, the world? But at least I do no injustice to the race when I say that such natures are the exception, and not the rule. I sometimes even now go into West End drawing-rooms, but hardly once in a score of times do I find one being in whom I can awaken an answering spark of sympathy with the longings and purpose of my life."

"Perhaps the West End drawing-room is not the best place in which to elicit the spark, Cyril. But there is, of course, truth in what you say and mean. The life of giddy pleasure and excitement which girls in the position of Sylvia O'Connor lead during

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their first seasons is one which tends to repress their better and finer feelings, and render them flippant, careless, useless. Many live through that phase, find the emptiness and hollowness of it all, and come out at the other end with opened eyes and minds alive and awake, eager for something better and higher; but there can be no doubt that some—too many—become mere social butterflies, caring for nothing save the gay round of fashion, thinking of nothing but how to make time pass the most pleasantly and easily, and shrinking with unspeakable disgust from all the sterner aspects of life."

"I know," he answered sadly. "Perhaps the fault is hardly theirs. But it seems so unspeakably sad for a fair young creature on the threshold of life to be cast adrift into a sea like that, where so little anchorage is to be found. And in another sphere what noble work she could do. Ah, the pity of it! the pity of it!"

I could see that something in Sylvia's innocent freshness and beauty had touched him, and in truth I did not wonder, for certainly she was a most lovely child, and as winning as she was lovely; and if she had in any wise fulfilled the promise of her childhood, she must by this time be a most beautiful girl.

May 3.—Yesterday's festivities went off well. We had ideal weather, and Cyril was very helpful. I think he enjoyed it, though always with the feeling of longing to transport his own parishioners here too. Edith and her sisters were as usual

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invaluable, and the pretty Irish girl came for a short time, but I was so busy I only just saw her. She is an exquisite young thing, with that air of dainty grace and finish which charms the eye almost more than beauty itself. She has an arch, winning way with her which I confess is very taking, and the mingled softness and sparkle in the long-lashed Irish eyes has a witching effect even on an old woman like me. She was so charmed with the quaint beauty of the Abbey that I asked Mrs. Carew to spare her to spend a day here soon. I will have Edith and her sisters to meet her. I think a little bright society will be good for Cyril at the present juncture.

He talked a little about Sylvia, telling me how sweetly and eagerly she threw herself into a silly romping game which she could not greatly have enjoyed for its own sake, just for the sake of pleasing the young people for whose benefit it had been organized. He was a little touched, too, I gather, by something she had said to him later. I want to know more of this pretty child. It may be that she has the makings of a grand woman in her, and perhaps it may help her sometimes to leave the atmosphere of Monckton Court for one a little different.

May 8.—I have carried out my plan, and I think it has answered well. Cyril is certainly roused and interested. He is regaining his physical vigour in a satisfactory way, and he is finding other subjects for thought than his home worries and work. His eyes have lost their jaded look, and the dark

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shadows under them have vanished. I am glad for him to be better before Dorothy arrives. She will soon be here, and I think she would have been shocked and grieved had she seen him a week ago.

Sylvia O'Connor and the Wingfield girls spent the day at the Abbey yesterday. It was a very hot afternoon, and after lunch we all sat for a considerable time under the great cedar-trees, and we talked of many things. The Wingfield girls fell over head and ears in love with Sylvia in a most entertaining fashion. I like to see girls do that; it argues a healthy temperament. They made her tell all about her presentation at her first Drawing Room, describe her dress in all its details, and every little detail of the ceremony. She told it all charmingly, even to rehearsing the difficult "Court curtsey" for their benefit, which she did with inimitable grace. It was amusing to see the Wingfield sisters trying to imitate it! It was like a homely house-sparrow striving to emulate the wheeling flight of the swallow. And then she went on to describe her first dinner-party, her first big reception, and to hit off with the most perfect natural grace and mimicry the voice and gestures of some of the singers, actors, and reciters she had heard. She sang us a most charming little French canzonette, with the piquant *verve* which only a French or Irish girl could display, and she gave us a vivid representation of a minuet she had seen danced at some house, holding up her white draperies, and moving her little daintily shod feet

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with a grace which was almost like a living poem. I confess that she captivated me utterly, and I think she took to me—or else she has the most charming and irresistible way of making you feel as though she had. I think we could have listened to her the whole afternoon.

But Cyril sat rather apart, and even I could not read the expression of his face, although I know his moods in the main, and generally form a shrewd guess at his thoughts. That he could not keep away from our fascinator was abundantly evident, or he could have left us at any time; but what he thought about it all I am unable to say. Perhaps he found his own time for speaking, if that was his desire; for I was called away presently, and when I came back the party had broken up, and I saw no more of my guests till tea-time, when they came back in a body.

Edith had got the conversation in hand then, and was talking in her quick, eager way about some of those things which she and Cyril discuss together—the problem of the London poor, and the great work which is being done in and for them. I beckoned Sylvia to me, thinking that perhaps she would be wearied by a subject with which she could not have much personal concern; but though she came and took the seat beside me with her eager smile and almost caressing grace of manner, her bright eyes were fixed full upon Cyril's face as he took up the word, and there was no mistaking the vivid interest in them.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she said, turning quickly

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upon me a few minutes later. "I have never met anybody quite like him before. He frightens me terribly, but I feel as though he does me good too. He is quite, quite different, and yet he is just like you, Lady Wylmington. I should know anywhere that you belonged to one another."

"You heard him preach in London once, did you not, my dear?"

"Oh yes—did he tell you? I heard him, and he made me listen to him, and—don't be shocked and cast me off for ever, Lady Wylmington—I don't often listen to a sermon, and when I do hear a little bit, there doesn't seem much sense in it, or else one feels one knows it all by heart and could finish it off oneself. But it wasn't like that when Mr. Benson preached. It made me feel all horrid inside, and I half hated him, and half wished he'd preach every Sunday till I *did* understand him; for I didn't know a bit what he meant then. Don't you think it's a great pity he lives in such an awful place, where nobody can hear him, and where he will only kill himself without even getting any thanks for it? And *we* want such men to teach us—oh, so badly!—and the ones who are worth anything hardly ever come near us!"

And there was actually a sparkle of tears in the girl's beautiful grey eyes, whilst the silvery voice quivered with a genuine emotion. There was a real pathos in the way she spoke that word *we*, and I knew so well whom she included in the small pronoun.

"My grandson chose the field to which he felt

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himself called. If it is not the one which those who watched his early career would have chosen, I think we have learned to acquiesce in his choice. No work is thrown away which is done in the spirit of his, and with visible results we have nothing to do. We have to cast our bread upon the waters and wait in patience till we find it again. But perhaps I am talking riddles to you, my dear. We have to learn patience in the school of experience."

"I like to hear riddles sometimes," answered Sylvia quickly. "I mean such riddles as these. I don't understand them. I am not good. I am not what people call *dévote*. I like everything to be bright and happy where I am. I cannot bear what is sad. But I *can* admire the people who go into those awful places and see and hear such terrible things. And when I meet a man like Mr. Benson (only I never did meet one before), I am ready to sink into the ground before him sometimes in shame at my own hollowness and flippancy. Lady Wylmington, tell me—Is it very wrong to enjoy life very, very much?—to find everything delightful?—to think society perfectly charming?—to like to be prettily dressed and to go about and see everything? *You* do not think I ought to give up everything?"

The emphasis on the pronoun told me that either Cyril had been saying something to Sylvia on the subject of renunciation, or else that she had applied to herself some words she had heard him speak, for the rapid glance thrown in his

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direction showed plainly that he was still the central figure in her thoughts.

"No, dear," I answered quietly. "You are born to a certain position in the world, and it is your present duty, whilst you are young and under obedience to your parents, to fill it in the way in which they would wish you to do. It is our high privilege as Christians to know that '*all* things are given us richly to enjoy,' and that there is a way of doing that which ensures enjoyment without any sense of emptiness and bitterness in the retrospect."

She was looking at me very eagerly and intently. I could see that the thoughtful side of her nature was aroused, and I felt that she had some of Cyril's own gift of quick sympathy and comprehension. It is a gift that may be a snare or may be a blessing, according to the way in which it is used; but trained aright it is an instrument which may do powerful work for its possessor.

"What way?" she asked, almost breathlessly.

"St. Paul has told us. His words are quite simple. He says that whether we eat or whether we drink, or *whatever we do*, we are to do all things 'to the Lord.' That is my answer to your question, Sylvia."

There was a sweet perplexity in her face as it was turned towards me.

"Lady Wylmington, I want to understand you better, for you make me feel better, somehow. Will you think me very frivolous and flippant if I ask you a practical question—because indeed I do not mean it flippantly!"

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"I am sure you do not, my dear. I will answer it to the best of my ability."

"Well, it is just this. When we go back to town I shall be taken to my first ball. I have been looking forward to it ever so long. I have a lovely dress being made for it. I know I shall enjoy myself most tremendously. But lots and lots of good people think dancing dreadfully wicked. Sometimes when I have been thinking about it I have wondered if I ought not to give it up. Now if I do go to that ball can I—as you put it—'do it to the Lord'?"

"Most certainly you can, my child. Do you think our Lord absents himself from His children in the ball-room more than in any other place?"

"I don't know; I have never thought about such things. But tell me how. What must I do?"

"If I were in your place, Sylvia, I should kneel in prayer before even putting on my dress, and pray very earnestly to be kept from vanity and too great love for the trifles which please the eye. You are going to this ball by the wishes of those who have the care of you; and your parents would not desire you to absent yourself, or set up a code of your own, before you have reached an age at which you can well judge of such things. It is right for you to go; but since you are conscious that you are inclined to rate such pleasures above their real value, you should pray with all your heart to be kept from temptation, to keep in mind that these passing shows are only the incidents of

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life, and that the unseen and eternal things are those upon which our minds should be set. You will not realize this for a long time, but keep prayerfully reminding yourself of it, and ask to be kept from an overweening love of outward and transitory things. Then, when you reach your destination, try never to be led into idle, flippant, or irreverent talk. You are not called upon at your age to rebuke others; but you *will* rebuke them by your silence. Be kind to girls less fortunate and less gifted than yourself. Do not seek to win admiration because it is pleasant, and never be led into that idle and mischievous amusement which is called flirting. If you can, even in the midst of all that is bright and gay and stirring, lift your heart in prayer and feel that your prayer is heard, then I think you may be sure that you are not being hurt by your enjoyment, and you may little by little do a work for God in the gay world in which it has pleased Him for the present at least to cast your lot."

Her sweet young face was gravely perplexed.

"I never thought of praying in a ball-room. I should have felt it was almost wrong."

"I have never found it impossible to pray anywhere, and if we are to 'pray without ceasing,' we shall have to learn to lift up our hearts in all places where our lot is cast. But, my dear, I seriously think that when prayer becomes impossible in any given locality or during any particular occupation, then there is peril in that place or in that amusement, and we must bethink ourselves

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seriously whither our steps are tending. But I must not lecture you any more, for I see they want you over there."

She went at once—I think with a sense of relief; but before she left she thanked me very sweetly for having taken the trouble to talk to her "as if she were a reasonable being with a soul," as she put it, looking up with that arch appeal in her eyes which made me kiss her on the spot. I think we shall be friends for the future. I hope I may see more of her, poor, pretty child, with a half-awakened soul and so much of the butterfly nature in her composition. I do not know whether it is a dangerous sign or no; but Cyril never said a word on the subject of Sylvia O'Connor after she had left. I certainly should not like to see him fall in love with her. She wants a far lighter and tenderer hand to guide and direct her than my young St. George can boast as yet. She is greatly fascinated by his eloquence and the self-devotion of his life; but he would never enter into the complexities of her nature, or understand that double strand in it which is at once its charm and its peril.

May 10.—Dorothy turned up to-day, quiet little mouse-like Dorothy, with her strange and almost unhealthy absorption in Cyril, and her shadow-like way of waiting on his steps. They are, however, perfectly happy together, and I think he opens his heart to her as he does not to me at this stage of his life. He is very much better, and talks of leaving at the end of three weeks. I shall

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do my best to keep him for the month. It will not be waste of time, though he thinks so now. I have some thoughts of asking down that Dr. Trevor of whom he speaks for a few days. I should like him to see Cyril before he leaves, and to hear if he really is fit for work; and I should be more happy in sending him away if he went in the company of a friend. I shall certainly think about it.

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CHAPTER IV

FRIENDS OR FOES?

"DOROTHY, how do you like Miss O'Connor?"

Cyril Benson was lying at full length on a grassy bank in the garden of Monckton Abbey, with his hat tilted over his eyes to protect them from the May sunshine. The "promise of May" this year seemed to be a preternaturally early summer. It was almost summer already. An open book lay by Cyril's side, but it was evident that for once he was more inclined for conversation than reading.

"I believe you are deaf, little sister," Cyril said, with a laugh. "Why don't you answer me?"

"I was thinking, Cyril," Dorothy said, looking up from her work. "You forget that I have only seen Miss O'Connor about three times yet. Ask me again in a month's time."

"That is so like you, you reserved puss, but she

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must have made some impression upon you. She is original, full of character and colour."

"To me she seems like a gorgeously-painted butterfly that settles on a flower and sucks the sweetness out of it, and then flutters on to something else," said Dorothy slowly. "Mind, I don't offer this as a final opinion, only as a first impression, and therefore worth nothing."

"I don't think your simile quite a happy one. 'Painted' is not a term that at present suits Miss O'Connor. She is much more like a damask rose, fresh from the hand of God;" and Cyril pushed back the hat from his eyes and raised himself on his elbow to catch a glimpse of Dorothy's face.

She laid down her work, and smiled.

"You used not to take much notice of whether a girl was beautiful or not," she said.

"I don't know that I have ever thought about it before," said Cyril. "It may be that from seeing nothing but ugly sights, and hearing nothing but street cries or street quarrels for so many months, my eyes and ears are more alive than usual to beautiful sights and sounds. Even the song of a cuckoo makes me feel quite sentimental and gushing, and years ago I never noticed whether the birds sang or were silent."

"Don't you sometimes long to live in the country again, Cyril? Have you never regretted your choice?"

"Never once! Never for a single instant," cried Cyril, with energy. "One can admire pretty things without desiring to possess them."

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This was decidedly a relief to Dorothy. At present, at any rate, her brother had not thrown away his heart on Sylvia O'Connor.

Suddenly the object of their thoughts and conversation stood before them, gay, laughing, a very impersonation of freshness and beauty in her delicately-coloured morning-gown. Both Cyril and Dorothy rose to their feet.

"You both of you look rather caught out, as if you were doing something wrong," cried Sylvia gaily. "I hope you were—it will put you more on a level with me. I believe you were asleep, Mr. Benson, and that you" (turning to Dorothy) "were reading a novel at this early hour in the morning."

"I was working," said Dorothy, a little stiffly.

"And I was lazy enough for the pair. I was doing nothing but talk. Dorothy is a newly-acquired treasure, and we don't ever get time enough to talk about all we wish, do we?" and Cyril glanced at his sister with a smile.

"Sit down again, and let me sit with you for a little while," continued Sylvia. "Lady Wylmington sent me in quest of you. I come charged with a message of importance from my aunt. Will you come for a picnic to-morrow?"

"I don't know whether my grandmother has any engagement," began Dorothy.

"Yes, she has!" cried the irrepressible Sylvia, "but she is as sweet as usual, and leaves you free to accept or decline as you think fit. I know I am playing you a mean trick in giving you the

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invitation face to face. It leaves you no loophole of escape, but you see I want you to come."

"And I want to come," said Cyril, smiling into the eager, animated face. "I need no excuse. I have not been to a picnic since I was a boy."

"And you, Miss Benson?" said Sylvia, turning to Dorothy.

"I shall like to go very much."

"I will be honest, and give you still a chance of retracting. I will count up the disadvantages," said Sylvia, holding up her pretty fingers. "One—the finest day sometimes ends in a thunderstorm. You may get wet!"

"I should like it. A good country rain will wash off all remembrance of London smuts," said Cyril.

"Two—you will have your tea in misery, instead of elegant ease," returned Sylvia.

"A gorse-bush is more comfortable than an easy-chair if you put a rug over it," said Dorothy.

"Three—the water will certainly be smoked, for we shall boil the kettle ourselves."

"Pray stop, Miss O'Connor. We are coming. It is useless to argue over the matter."

"Very well. Don't say you come unwarned. What has possessed Aunt Annie to propose such an entertainment, I cannot think! I confess that usually cold shudders seize me at the very notion of a picnic, but I feel as if to-morrow we shall have a good deal of fun. Don't come if the glass falls. Will you ride or drive, Miss Benson? My aunt has plenty of room in the carriage."

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"Thank you. I don't ride. I am too much of a coward. I shall be glad to go with Mrs. Carew. What time shall we be at the Court?"

"At two punctually, please. It is a ten-mile drive to Firth Beacon."

"By the way, we shall have a friend, a Dr. Trevor, with us. He is coming to the Abbey to-night. May we bring him?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"Certainly; the more the merrier. Shall you ride, Mr. Benson? My cousin could give you a mount," said Sylvia, rising to go.

"Thank you, very much, but I think my grandmother can provide horses for Trevor and myself." And Cyril prepared to accompany Miss O'Connor to the lodge.

"I am going on to the Rectory to secure the Wingfield trio, and then our party will be complete, and nothing remains but to wish for a fine day. I suppose we shall pay for this lovely May by an Arctic June, and oh! I do *so want* fine weather then."

"For your London season, I suppose?" remarked Cyril.

"Yes, for my London season," echoed Sylvia, with a touch of defiance in her tone, and then they both laughed.

"I'll see you safely on your road to the Rectory, if I may," said Cyril; and having bade Dorothy good-bye, the pair walked off together.

Her eyes followed them sadly.

"He is attracted by that girl as I have never

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seen him attracted before," she thought. "I hope it will not go further, for, beautiful as she is, she has not soul enough to appreciate a man like Cyril."

"What secret engagement hinders your gracing Mrs. Carew's picnic to-morrow?" asked Cyril, playfully touching Lady Wylmington's hand at lunch that day.

"My agent is coming to discuss various matters that need attention. Anyway, I do not think I should have ventured. My picnicking days are over," said Lady Wylmington, with a smile. "I am glad you are going. It will give Dr. Trevor a chance of seeing something of the country. By the way, shall you drive in to meet him, Cyril? His train reaches Taunton about six o'clock."

"Yes, I had thought of it. The drive through the green lanes will be simply lovely this afternoon."

"Hulloa, Trevor!"

"Well, Benson, how are you? I need not ask, though. A glance at your face tells me that 'Richard is himself again!'"

Such was the outwardly phlegmatic greeting exchanged between the two friends at the Taunton station that evening, but the cordial hand-shake which accompanied the words left no doubt about their mutual pleasure in meeting.

"How are the Brotherhood?" was Cyril's next question,

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"All well, and working famously in your absence."

They passed out of the station-yard together, and at the gate encountered Edith Wingfield, who was peering up and down the road for her carriage. Cyril stopped and raised his hat—

"Are you looking for your pony-carriage?" he inquired.

"Yes. I cannot think why it is not here. I have been out for the day at a Girls' Friendly Festival, and my sisters promised to meet me."

"Were they coming straight from Monckton, for I did not pass them on my way here?"

"Yes, they were not going elsewhere," said Edith.

"Surely your best plan will be to take a seat in my grandmother's carriage until we meet your pony. I have just driven in to meet Dr. Trevor. Allow me to introduce him to you?"

Edith bowed, and gratefully accepted the offer of a seat in the carriage. To be landed at a station five miles from home at six o'clock in the evening was an awkward predicament from which she was glad to be relieved; and she established herself contentedly in a corner of the carriage, determined to efface herself, and not interrupt the talk between the two friends. What a curious contrast they were! Cyril, with his beautiful clear-cut features, and dark eyes that altered their expression with every passing emotion; and Dr. Trevor, with his plain, rugged features that were only redeemed from positive ugliness by the light grey eyes that occasionally beamed with a benignant kindliness.

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"A man with a manner that belies his character," decided Edith to herself. "He is blunt to a fault, but I am sure one could trust him. I should not mind consulting his opinion on any subject. He looks possessed of a good sound judgment."

The setting sun brought out in bold relief the outlines of the two beautiful ranges of hills that stretched into the distance, the horses trotted swiftly through the green lanes, the air was full of sweet scents and sounds.

"No wonder this place has made a new man of you, Benson," said Dr. Trevor. "How beautiful it is! I suppose you have given yourself over absolutely to rest and enjoyment during this last fortnight?"

"Yes," Cyril answered. "I have been as idle as even you could wish me to be. My only pretence of work has been to write an answer to that attack on Infant Baptism, which that injudicious but doubtless well-meaning Dissenter, Martin, has been sowing broadcast in my parish. I really enjoyed the work. It is a subject of such absorbing interest. I have sent it off to the printer, and I hope, in a few weeks' time, I shall be able to send it to every house where that tract has been circulated. It is only fair that my people shall read the two sides of the subject."

Dr. Trevor burst into a hearty laugh.

"I think there is no question that my patient is nearly well, Miss Wingfield. His fighting propensities have returned in full force. He is generally engaged in some argumentative correspondence,

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but before he came away for his holiday he was sad and silent. Now you see how eager he is for the fray; although I am bound to admit that if any of his flock are in trouble he is ready to help, whatever may be their creed."

"We are talking of nothing but our own concerns," interposed Cyril. "We shall bore Miss Wingfield sadly with our parish gossip;" and he dexterously turned the conversation into other channels, gradually leading Dr. Trevor into some account of his life in Cornwall. Edith listened with interest, and felt quite sorry when a turn in the road about a mile away from Monckton brought them face to face with her sisters in the pony-carriage.

"Better late than never!" she cried merrily, as she dismounted and got into her own carriage.

"Pony lost a shoe, and we had to take him back to the forge," was the laughing answer.

"We pictured your fury at being kept waiting so long at Taunton, and instead you have been whirled home ever so much faster than we could bring you. Thank you very much, Mr. Benson. You have saved mother an anxious half-hour of speculation as to why we were late;" and the merry trio rattled off down the lane which led to the Rectory.

"What a bright, pleasant face Miss Wingfield has," remarked Dr. Trevor, looking after the retreating carriage with a pleased smile.

"Yes; we want a few workers of that type in our parish, don't we?" was the reply.

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"You certainly have parish on the brain," said his friend, with an amused smile. "Even a chance acquaintance is viewed as a possible future worker!"

"I am afraid there is not a chance of getting her," continued Cyril, in no way disconcerted. "She is a very busy little woman here, as far as I can see. Look, Trevor! there is the first view of the Abbey. Does it not stand well? I am wonderfully fond of the old place. Some of my happiest associations hover round it."

"It is a lovely place altogether, I think," responded Dr. Trevor warmly.

They drove in at the park gate and quickly drew rein at the hall door, where Dorothy came forward to welcome them. Dr. Trevor was no stranger to her. She had often met him at her brother's rectory, and had a growing respect and liking for him as she knew more of his character and work.

Lady Wylmington welcomed Dr. Trevor to the Abbey with her usual kindliness and courtesy, and before the evening was over she had decided that he was a man whom you could trust, and upon whose opinion you might safely depend, and she determined to consult him as soon as possible about the wisdom of her grandson's returning to work.

"I hope you will not hurry away, Dr. Trevor," she said, as the evening drew to a close.

"I will stay for a week if you will have me. I am afraid I must not be away longer. I cannot

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tell you how delightful the change seems to me," Dr. Trevor said, turning to Lady Wylmington.

"We will go back together, Trevor," cried Cyril. "I feel like a giant refreshed, and three weeks, after all, is a good long holiday."

"No, my dear fellow, I shall not abate a day of the month I prescribed, and I am sure Lady Wylmington will support my authority."

"Oh, if you intend to bring my grandmother's moral suasion to bear upon me, I may as well give in at once. Her will has long been my law;" and Cyril bent to kiss her as he bade her good-night.

The next morning Lady Wylmington volunteered to take Dr. Trevor round the gardens and greenhouses.

"I very much wished to have a little private talk with you about my grandson. Do you really think him better?" said Lady Wylmington, as they started from the house.

"Greatly better—nearly well, in fact," was the encouraging response.

A spasm of untold relief crossed Lady Wylmington's handsome features.

"I think I can trust you to tell me the truth. Need his late illness cause me any anxiety in the future?" she asked very gently.

Dr. Trevor paused for a moment before he answered the question.

"Indeed, Lady Wylmington, I find your question hard to answer. We doctors, like clergymen, often work in the dark. If your grandson's fainting fit

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were simply a nervous collapse from overwork there is little to fear. A few weeks' rest ought to set him to rights. The point about it that made me uneasy was its following directly upon a headache of unusual severity. I accepted that as a sign of an over-wrought brain, which is a very different matter. Hence my peremptory orders for complete rest and change of scene."

"And you think it might recur?" said Lady Wylmington.

"Certainly under like provocation, but I hope I have said enough to warn your grandson. Clergymen provoke me rather as patients. They seem to think they are made of different stuff from other men. They use up their strength faster than they can make it. I have known several town clergy who have been reduced by seven years' incessant work and worry to lives of semi-invalidism, and a little common-sense might have saved them from it all."

Lady Wylmington smiled.

"At any rate, theirs is a calling where an excess of enthusiasm may be forgiven," she said.

"Enthusiasm tempered with discretion," answered Dr. Trevor, with dogged determination.

A very gay cavalcade started from Monckton Court that lovely May afternoon: first a carriage and pair conveying Mrs. Carew, Dorothy, and two of the Wingfield girls. Behind them rode Sylvia O'Connor and Edith Wingfield, accompanied by Cyril Benson, Jem Carew, and Dr. Trevor; and a light cart behind with provisions

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and servants brought up the rear. Everybody was bent on enjoyment, and much laughter and talking filled the air. It scarcely seemed probable that that afternoon's excursion would settle the vocation of at least two of the party, yet so it was.

Sylvia looked very lovely, flushed with exercise and merriment, and sitting her horse with that ready grace that only those accustomed to riding from their infancy ever acquire. Her grey eyes sparkled with fun and amusement from beneath their long lashes, the sunshine caught the rippling masses of her brown hair, waking up hidden touches of gold. Dorothy gravely looking back at her, decided that she had never seen such a beautiful girl. By her side other girls seemed to sink into commonplace insignificance. One person that afternoon, however, refused to be drawn into her charmed circle, and that person was Dr. Trevor. He was not a society man, knew little, and cared less for the brilliant repartee that passes for conversation in a London drawing-room, and he treated all Sylvia's bright little sallies with either rather blunt answers or silence. His reserve amused her. She was conscious of her power to extract a nearly universal homage from the men who crossed her path, but after a few good-natured attempts to draw the "Cornishman" into conversation, she left him, as she afterwards explained, "to 'grump' in silence," contenting herself with her cousin and Cyril Benson.

Dr. Trevor and Edith Wingfield dropped behind.

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Here, at any rate, was a girl who could talk sense, thought Dr. Trevor.

"Your friend is lively," he said, with a rather cynical laugh.

"Lovely and lively," retorted Edith, quick to note the slightest depreciation of her new friend. "She is a pretty girl who can be equally charming to men and women alike."

"Does charm consist in chatter?" inquired Dr. Trevor, a little bluntly. "There is plenty of Irish sparkle about her, but personally I prefer a woman who talks of something instead of nothing."

Edith's face fell.

"You cannot tell," she said earnestly. "How can you judge of any one after half-an-hour's acquaintance, when grave subjects would be out of place?"

"True!" ejaculated Dr. Trevor, with an unwonted gentleness. "At any rate, Miss O'Connor is fortunate in having so firm a friend. What a happy life you must lead here. I never knew till I lost them how I prized the companionship of birds and flowers, nor how cordially I loved country as beautiful as this;" and he pointed with his riding-whip to the undulating line of hills that stretched in such fair beauty before them.

Edith looked up into the plain, rugged face, and traced depths of sentiment and tenderness hidden underneath.

"Do you miss the country so badly?" she answered sympathetically. "I want more stir in my life, a vocation to which I might devote my

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whole energies. I am happy here in a way, but I feel as if life were rather frittered away; a little parish work, a class in the Sunday-school, interspersed in summer with a great deal of tennis, and a considerable amount of gaiety. A year or two back I was wild to join a Sisterhood, but neither my father nor mother liked the notion."

"No, I should think you were too young to take such an important step," said Dr. Trevor.

"They did not like the notion of my going out of the way to find a vocation, but my father said that when I was five-and-twenty, if suitable work presented itself, he would not hinder my taking it."

"And has the suitable work presented itself?" asked Dr. Trevor, interested by Edith's evident earnestness.

"That is what I determined to ask you to-day," said Edith simply. "Mr. Benson has talked much about the need of women helpers in his parish. I should love to go and work there, if there is work that I could undertake. You could tell me if I were likely to be of any use, whether my country training would unfit me for town work. I don't wish to ask father's consent to offer myself as a helper, unless I were likely to be of real service."

Dr. Trevor smiled.

"Women like you could hardly fail to be of real service anywhere," he said kindly. "I suppose you are strong?"

"Very. I have never been under a doctor all my life."

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"And you know what you would have to face in the way of misery and sadness and sin?"

"No," said Edith; "but I am ready to face all these if I could help to alleviate them."

"Have you ever had any training for any special sort of work?" continued Dr. Trevor.

"I have taken a month or two at a home for sick children," answered Edith. "I paid for the training, as I am very fond of nursing. Of course I know all the poor people here very well, but I have done no systematic work. I do what comes along."

"Any knowledge of nursing would be extremely valuable. Of course there is *very* much that women could do at St. Chads," said Dr. Trevor thoughtfully. "It would not be a bad thing to come and try, if your parents allowed it, without taking any special vows."

"I am not as keen about taking vows as I was a year or two back," Edith answered, with a smile. "The only vow I should make would be the promise to do my very best, and if I found I had made a mistake, and undertaken something for which I was unfitted, I could retire without disgrace. The very grave question that presents itself is where and how I could live. I could not live by myself."

"Have you mentioned the matter to Miss Benson? I fancy from something she once said that she would be glad to come and live near her brother if she had a companion."

"No; the plan has only taken definite shape in

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my brain since I met Mr. Benson, and I know his sister but slightly, but thank you for the hint. I will certainly consult her about it at an early opportunity, and if she agreed, it would then be time enough to ask my father and mother's consent to let me make the trial. I am very grateful to you for your advice."

"It will be a glad day for St. Chads when two capable women come to live there," Dr. Trevor answered, charmed with the girl's simple sincerity.

"You are assuming that we are capable before we have been proved," cried Edith gaily. "Shall we rejoin the others?" and at her bidding the loitering horses were put into a canter.

The destination of the party was a beautifully-wooded hollow about half-way up Firth Beacon. There was much stir and bustle when they arrived. The riders dismounted, and the men saw the horses safely tethered. Fuel had to be collected for a fire, which required much coaxing and a reckless expenditure of matches before it would burn. Never surely before had a kettle taken so long to boil! When tea was made it was discovered that the sugar had been forgotten, and that there was a niggardly supply of milk, but these casualties were forgotten under the influences of the sweet sunshine and air.

The party pronounced everything perfect, and even Mrs. Carew bore the small discomforts with composure, under the smiling consciousness that her party was a success.

"Let us wander about for a bit before we go

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back," said Sylvia, springing to her feet. "Who is ready to climb the Beacon?"

"Not I," retorted Jem, "I must see to the horses; but don't keep me loitering here all night, Sylvia."

"Mr. Benson, don't be lazy. Do come," pleaded Sylvia coaxingly; "and won't your sister come too?"

"We will start at once," Cyril answered, "and leave the others to follow."

It was a steep climb, and Sylvia was hampered by her habit, but she led the way bravely, and threw herself breathless on the grass when she reached the top.

"You led us on to scale the hill like a Joan of Arc," said Cyril, seating himself beside her.

"It is worth the climb, though. Look at the view, just look at it!" cried Dorothy, wakened up into a momentary enthusiasm.

Truly it was a fair scene to look upon. The sun was nearing its setting, and with a sharply descending foreground they looked across a smiling valley to an undulating line of purple hills that stood out in startling clearness in the evening light.

"How clear it is!" exclaimed Cyril. "So clear that one almost fears a break up of this glorious weather."

"Are you one of those people that never let one enjoy the present without forecasting trouble in the future?" said Sylvia, a little petulantly. "I hate to be told because it is lovely and fine to-day

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that it will probably rain to-morrow. I like to take all the happiness that comes along and enjoy it. It is beautiful to live to-night."

"I did not mean my casual prophecy of wet weather to spoil your enjoyment of to-day," Cyril answered, with a smile. "For me nothing can spoil it. It will be a fresh, green memory to carry back with me to St. Chads."

"Look, Cyril, at the wood that runs half-way up the hill," interposed Dorothy. "There is every shade of green upon it."

Far below, a cuckoo was calling loud and strong to its mate.

"That loving fellow will have no voice left to-morrow if he oversings himself so much to-night," said Cyril, with a little laugh. "I cannot think what has happened to the others. It is a pity they should miss all this beauty. I wish Trevor had joined us."

"Ah, no!" cried Sylvia, with a quick gesture of dissent; "it would have spoiled the party. He is so *triste*, so grave and silent. It is like taking about a walking fog with one. He would have taken the joy even out of this;" and she stretched out her hands to the beautiful view, as if it were a thing she could touch.

Cyril looked up with quick surprise.

"It is not like your usual kindliness to take up an unreasoning dislike," he said.

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders.

"I neither like nor dislike him," she answered, quick to resent the implied rebuke. "He is not

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an amusing companion, that is all. He is not used to ladies, I should say, and I don't think him quite a gentleman. He bores me."

The words were no sooner spoken than they were repented. Cyril's dark eyes lightened with a fire of indignation.

"Trevor 'not quite a gentleman,'" he echoed, "because he has no pretty tricks, and misses the surface polish that mixing much in society gives a man! Trevor, with his tender heart, and his gentleness unsurpassed by a woman's; a man incapable of a mean thought, or a base action, who spends his whole life in doing good! Trevor not a gentleman! It just shows how utterly superficial the judgment of a society girl is."

Sylvia, who was far more accustomed to praise than blame, had flushed crimson at Cyril's sudden outburst. Then she turned very pale.

"I think, Cyril, Miss O'Connor scarcely meant her words to be taken so seriously," said Dorothy. "Surely she is at liberty to hold her own opinion."

Sylvia gave her a little grateful smile and recovered herself sufficiently to speak. With an irresistible frankness she put her hand lightly into Cyril's, which rested on the grass beside her.

"At any rate, the society girl is not afraid to own herself in the wrong," she said, "though I think you are unnecessarily hard upon her. It was uncalled for, on my part, to pass judgment on your friend."

Cyril's hand closed on the little one that touched

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his. Then very gently, almost reverently, he let it go.

"You have convinced me of the beam in my own eye," he said, rising to his feet, and looking earnestly into the beautiful face turned up to his. "I feel that I have behaved like a brute, and owe you a thousand apologies. May I add in self-defence that I think when you know Trevor better you will reverse your opinion?"

Sylvia's sweet eyes fell.

"Very likely," she said gently, and with the mutual concession peace was restored.

Dorothy, watching the transient quarrel, was inclined to condemn Sylvia as a hopeless flirt, but Dorothy was wrong. Sylvia was used to admiration and liked it, but she never consciously did anything to gain it.

"We have been here ever so long," cried Sylvia, springing to her feet, "and there are limits to even Jem's patience. It will be quite dusk now before we get home."

"So ends our picnic without any of the woes which you depicted when you gave us the invitation," said Cyril, as he followed Sylvia with reluctant steps down the hill.

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CHAPTER V

MORE LEAVES FROM SYLVIA'S DIARY

Monckton Court, May 15.

I AM certainly keeping my diary in as irregular a fashion as will satisfy even my ill-disciplined character. It is nearly a fortnight since I have written a line in it.

It is Sunday afternoon. Jem has gone out to exercise the dogs, Aunt Annie is nodding in an easy-chair, and I have climbed up to my bedroom in the tower, and have decided to review the last week or two, and see if there is anything worth recording. I have always had this pretty octagonal bedroom in the tower since I was a child. I love it for many reasons. I climb up to it by a quaint little staircase that winds round and round like a cork-screw. It is higher than any room in the house, and I look down upon a parapet below, but I have a perfectly glorious

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view of the country around. I have a sense of freedom and isolation that is delightful. I can be as quiet and peaceful as I like, not that, as a rule, my passion for peace and quietness runs to any excess. One of the changes that Aunt Annie proposed when I came out was that I should have a suite of rooms on the first floor; a bedroom, a dressing-room for my maid, and a pretty little sitting-room of my own, but I pleaded so hard for permission to be left undisturbed in my airy tower that she reluctantly gave in.

I have not had an exciting fortnight, but country life possesses a peaceful charm of its own. I have seen a good deal of the people at the Abbey. Lady Wylmington is a curious contrast to Aunt Annie. I think Lady Wylmington takes the highest standard about things of any one I have ever come across. I admire her immensely, and have had a good deal of talk with her at one time or another. I always feel as if the households at the Court and the Abbey would be improved by mixing up together. Aunt Annie's views of life are entirely conventional. What society will think is the ruling principle of her life, and when I am with her I weary of the hollow shallowness of it all, but with Lady Wylmington I feel in too rarefied a moral atmosphere. I should never reach it. Life there is altogether too solemn and earnest. I often feel oppressed by it, and yet when I come back here I have a vague desire for something more satisfactory than Aunt Annie's code of morals. One

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gets to know people quickly in the country. You come across so few that you drop rapidly into intimacy. In London one makes many charming acquaintances, but life in the country would resolve itself into a few intimate friendships. I feel, for example, as if I had known Mr. Benson for years, and I met him for the first time about three weeks ago. One talks quite differently to people down here; less on the surface, more on topics worth talking of. As I said before, life gets altogether too earnest. I am happiest when I do not *think*. I have made the acquaintance of Mr. Benson's sister Dorothy, the only woman he cares a straw for in the world except Lady Wylmington, and to love her is no particular credit to him. Nobody could help loving her. One may be frightened at her, as I am, but one is bound to love and admire any one so beautiful and good. I should be a better girl if she loved me.

Dorothy is quite different. I shall not make friends quickly with her. She is little, and dark, and selfless, chiefly remarkable for a passionate and absorbing admiration of her brother. She is very quiet; but I fancy, like most people, "thinks the more." I often find her watchful dark eyes scanning me thoughtfully, and I feel inclined to say, "Well, what do you think of me?"

If I did, I suppose she would not answer, except with an enigmatical smile. I like Edith Wingfield far better than Dorothy. She is quite as good, and as cheerful as a robin. Why *should* not good people be cheerful? Edith Wingfield is an

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enthusiast about work, and I can see that Mr. Benson's stories about the East End, of the work to be done, and the need of workers, are firing her with a fervent ambition to devote herself entirely to doing something big. I should not be the least surprised at her joining a Sisterhood, or taking some desperate step like that. Mr. Benson's stories have quite a different effect on me. I don't want to hear them. They make me so very unhappy; and yet, like ghost stories, they possess a sort of gruesome fascination for me, but they open up the same unsatisfying problem.

Why are people's lives so different? Why is mine all sunshine, and many a girl's in London nothing but shadow and sorrow? Why is life so unequal?

I believe Mr. Benson thinks I don't care a bit as long as I am happy and comfortable. I told him one day I believed he thought everything beautiful to look at, or pretty to wear, was sinful. He said "No," he only wanted others to share them. Aunt Annie, who was sitting by, looked up and shook her finger at him, and called him a "sad socialist."

"What is a socialist?" I asked quickly. Aunt Annie always mentions the word as if it were connected with the Evil One himself.

"And they had all things in common," quoted Mr. Benson quietly.

"Exactly so," cried Aunt Annie; "but that was for a special purpose and time. You cannot

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wish us now to do away with all distinctions of rank or means."

"I should be more than satisfied if there was not 'one among us that lacked,'" Mr. Benson answered, with a kindly smile.

I don't think Aunt Annie likes him much. She calls him a prig, who is bent on setting everybody to rights.

"I wonder where you have your dresses made?" Mr. Benson asked one day, as gravely as if he were propounding a proposition from Euclid. I think I answered him first only by a burst of laughter.

"Do you mean to say you actually know enough of the fashion to judge if a girl's dress is well or ill-made?" I asked, with unfeigned amusement.

"No," he said. "Of course I know whether I like them or not; but I am awfully ignorant about fashion. I was only wondering if you knew *how* they were made. You have so many dresses," he added apologetically, "and I thought perhaps you would make sure that you went to some dressmaker who did not overwork or under-pay her *employées*."

"How can I find out?" I cried, a little impatiently. "I know I pay very big bills. You are a man of one idea, Mr. Benson. You only care for poor people and their wrongs."

"Yes, you are right," he said gently. "I am afraid I am getting narrow."

Jem is calling to me, so I must stop. What a rigmarole I have written.

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May 17.—This has been a pleasant day. Aunt Annie suddenly roused up yesterday and proposed that we should have a picnic whilst this unusual weather lasts, so she fixed it for to-day. I went off to secure recruits. I went first to the Abbey where I engaged Mr. Benson and his sister, and then I ran on to the Wingfields and invited Edith and her sisters. The trio greeted the notion with acclamation. This, with a Dr. Trevor, a friend of the Bensons, who arrived at the Abbey last night, completed the party. I owe this same Dr. Trevor a grudge, as he was the cause of a tiff between Mr. Benson and me. With my usual Irish impulsiveness I let out that I did not particularly draw to Dr. Trevor; for no definite reason—

> "The reason why I cannot tell,
> I do not like thee, Dr. Fell;"

and I added, still more incautiously, that I did not think him quite a gentleman! I know it was horrid of me, but I really meant no harm. Anyway it was quite a relief to me to discover that Mr. Benson is not wholly a saint after all. He distinctly lost his temper and exploded in such a burst of indignation that I was fairly frightened, and capitulated at once. We made it up after a bit.

Our tea-party was held on Firth Beacon, and was, I think, successful on the whole. We were very merry. I rode home with Jem, who was a little sulky at being left to himself whilst some

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of our party climbed to the top of the beacon after tea. I made myself very agreeable, for I was very anxious to arrange a definite time for our return to London, and Jem was the arbiter of my fate.

"Do you want to go back so very much, Sylvia? It is much nicer down here," answered my country-loving cousin.

"It palls after a time," I said; "but why should we drag you, a reluctant victim, at our heels? If you would let me have Aunt Annie you could stay down here a bit longer alone. I am afraid I must have Aunt Annie. It is only American girls who go about without chaperons."

"I don't believe you have another thought but your London season. If you go, of course I shall come too; but I can't think what makes you in such a hurry. You seem amusing yourself very well with that parson fellow," Jem answered, a little huffily.

"Amusing myself!" I echoed. "Never was a more inappropriate epithet. I never knew any one who made me feel so uncomfortable. It is because I need amusement by way of a change that I want to go to London."

"If that fellow is rude to you," broke in the usually good-tempered Jem, "I will——"

"Spare your threats, Jem," I interposed. "Mr. Benson is always most civil and kind" ("Except when he loses his temper," was my mental reservation); "and it is only because he is so good that he makes me feel preternaturally wicked. Most

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people *are* wicked, more or less, but it is horribly uncomfortable to become aware of the fact. In his society my sins weigh heavily upon me."

"Oh, is that all?" said Jem, in a relieved tone. "Well, I would rather be bad like you than good like him, any day. I don't think he is going to stay much longer. If you wish it we will go back to London—say to-morrow week. I have some rather important business that I must finish off before then."

"You are quite a good boy now," I cried, highly delighted at carrying my point.

We have had lovely weather to-day; but as I look from my tower window to-night I see clouds gathering in the west. I fear the fine weather is ended.

May 19.—A pouring wet day. Aunt Annie and I had a long and somewhat exhausting *tête-à-tête* in the morning, and in the afternoon I took refuge in Jem's library, which is more famous for its guns, its fishing-rods, and cricket bats than for its books.

"I am bored, Jem, horribly bored. Can't you amuse me? I can't even find the last volume of —— why, *here* it is!" I cried, spying the missing volume I was looking for on Jem's table. "That was very selfish of you," I said reprovingly. "An old novel serves to set you off in a doze as well as a new one. It is horrid and wet and cold. Please get a match and light the fire."

"I am dull too, Sylvia. I am so glad you have come," said Jem, pulling forward the most com-

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Toffee making.—p. 111.

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fortable easy-chair. "We will soon have a roaring fire. You won't be dull now, will you?" he added, a little wistfully.

"Not more dull than usual, Jem, under like circumstances," I said cheerfully. "Toffee might raise our drooping spirits. Once upon a time you used to make such good toffee."

"I don't think I could make toffee now. Simpson would set me down as a fool."

Simpson was the family butler.

"I am not a bit afraid of Simpson's opinion, so I shall just run and ask the cook for the necessary materials. Let me see, what shall we want? Fresh butter, brown sugar, grated rind of a lemon, and an open tin."

"Brass saucepan rather," said Jem.

"You are an arch hypocrite. You are dying to make that toffee," I said, nodding at him, as I ran from the room.

I captured Simpson, and took him into confidence, taking the responsibility of the scheme on to my own shoulders to spare Jem's blushes. Anyhow I got my own way.

"We will wait for a clear fire, and then we will try to concoct the toffee of our youth," I said.

It was no use appealing to Jem's sentiment; he had none, but I am bound to say he made himself useful over that toffee. It was excellent, and kept us quite busy for an hour.

"Jem," I cried, "I hear the door-bell, and look at my face, and my hands are all sticky. None

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but enthusiastic country people would dream of coming out on a day like this."

"Mr. and Miss Benson and Miss Wingfield are in the drawing-room, if you please, miss," announced Simpson, with imperturbable gravity.

"Jem, I shall carry in this plate of toffee. They won't try to shake hands then, and my red nose will cheer them up on this wet day. Come along, we can't keep them waiting whilst we make ourselves tidy."

"I call it real charity to come over to see us this wet day," I said, advancing down the drawing-room with the plate in my hand.

"Don't shake hands, please. My hands are sticky. We have been making toffee (Jem is rather a good cook), and we have brought you our handiwork to taste."

Here I came to a dead stop. There was a gravity in the demeanour of our guests that made me feel that they had come charged with news of great importance.

"Whatever is the matter? You have something to tell us. I see it in your faces. Don't keep me waiting. Tell it before Aunt Annie comes down, so that I may get over the first flutter of excitement."

"Oh, don't laugh, Sylvia. It really is very solemn," said Edith, a little tremulously. "Father has agreed to let me go and work in Mr. Benson's parish for a time, and Miss Benson is coming too."

"I knew it," I said triumphantly. "I felt it in

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the air days ago. I knew you were making up your mind to some tremendous sacrifice."

"But it is *not* a sacrifice," said Miss Benson sedately. "We both of us like it."

"You *can't* like it," I persisted, "unless you are superhuman. You may be glad to go and help, but the process will be horrid. Your determination fills me with admiring awe. Are you going to start as sisters, nurses, school-mistresses, or lady-helps?"

"I don't like ladies going slumming!" said Jem sententiously. He had taken all this time to recover the shock of the announcement. The remark came at a happy moment, when we were all feeling a little strained, and we greeted it with an indulgent laugh.

"Unfortunately we need help so urgently," said Mr. Benson, speaking for the first time, "that I am afraid I am not unselfish enough to refuse two such likely volunteers, and ladies of the right sort are generally the best workers. I think they mean to join no special order until they see how they get on," he continued, answering my question.

Aunt Annie greeted the news with unconcealed dismay.

"I am very sorry not to be able to congratulate you," she said quite sadly. "I must say I prefer a girl to stay at home until she marries, but the world is upside down now-a-days, and every girl thinks it necessary to seek some vocation. However, I am sure you both mean well, and I hope you will not overwork yourselves."

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After tea I offered to show Mr. Benson the conservatory, and we went off together, but I saw that his heart was not in the flowers.

"Do you really take no interest in Miss Wingfield's and my sister's determination?" he asked suddenly.

"Have I seemed so heartless?" I said, moved to quick repentance.

"Not heartless exactly, but you have touched it, as you touch most things, with a graceful lightness. You dismissed it with a laugh."

"Because there is no other alternative in this desperately earnest society," I said, fairly brought to bay. "I try to keep on the surface because all you people at the Abbey take life so seriously. I did not want to cry to-day, so I laughed instead. Girls' laughter often hides tears, but men, looking on, condemn us as butterflies."

I spoke hotly, as I felt.

"I think you wrong us. Anyway butterflies supply a great want in nature. How much they add to the grace and beauty of a summer's day."

"Thank you for nothing," I answered impatiently. "The simile is no compliment. I am to content myself with the *rôle* of butterfly, and let girls like your sister and Edith be classed as bees who store honey to make the lives of other people sweet."

I know I spoke petulantly. Mr. Benson was not looking at me, but seemed intent on gazing down the throat of a gloxinia. I suppose that

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some tone of my voice told him that I was vexed, for he turned towards me with a smile.

"I was neither rash nor rude enough to imply that you were only that. I fancy"—with a quick sigh—"that you must bring a great deal of sweetness into the lives of other people."

I was staggered alike by the compliment and the assertion. I really did not know if his words were true. I don't know that I brighten anybody's life, unless it may be Jem's.

"I think I may have appeared a little unsympathetic about the girls' resolve," I said at last; "because I am afraid I am at a loss to understand the motives that actuate them. I appreciate the action itself. The call comes to them, and they obey it, but that they can look forward to such a life with pleasure, or that they can be happy in it, I fail to understand. I could only look forward to a life like that with dread and loathing."

My companion winced a little, and was silent for a long time—so long that I feared I had vexed him. I turned to look at his face, and saw that it was very white, and there was a look I could not interpret in his dark eyes.

"Ah! you make me speak my mind, and then you are angry with me," I said regretfully. "It is safer to let me keep on the surface."

"No," he said, rather sadly, "I wanted to know what you thought. Clearly the call is not for you. You would do no good if you hated the work. Sometimes I have thought——"

What he thought he never told me, for the others

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had followed us, and the conversation became general. I felt disinclined for further chatter, and was glad when we returned to the drawing-room for music. Edith played, and I sang song after song, as they seemed to like it. It is really a pleasure to sing to people who like it, to a small and sympathetic audience. However hardly Mr. Benson may judge me, I am really stirred to my heart by the events of to-day. I often wish I had never come across Mr. Benson. I was so light-hearted and happy. Now I am constantly worrying my brain about things I don't understand.

May 20.—Dr. Trevor has left the Abbey to-day. Mr. Benson's prophecy is unfulfilled. I don't much like him. He has no grace of manner, and absolutely no small talk, so I find him heavy.

We have been much at the Abbey. The weather has been wet, and there has been nothing else to do. I started lots of games, battledore and shuttlecock, hide-and-seek, etc., and succeeded at times in making them all delightfully frivolous. I feared that Lady Wylmington would condemn me as an empty-headed doll, and I delivered myself up to her one day as the ringleader of all the mischief. She surprised me by patting me on the head, and saying she owed me a debt of gratitude for making it so merry for her grandson. So I just threw my arms round her neck and called her "a dear." It has been settled to-day that we go to London on May 24.

May 24, *Monckton Abbey.*—There is something really to write about at last. Something has

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happened that will never leave me quite the same again. I feel years older, for I have looked death in the face, and, thank God, I have escaped. I want to write the story of it carefully, for nothing more serious will ever happen to me. I do so long for mother to-day. It would have been awful to die last night, and never see her again. But I will begin at the beginning.

Last night we were dining at the Abbey, a kind of farewell dinner, for our coterie was to break up the next day. We were to move to London. Mr. Benson had settled to return to his London parish by an early train, and Lady Wylmington and Dorothy had planned to go up to London in a few days, bringing Edith Wingfield with them, so that she and Dorothy might complete their simple preparations for going to St. Chads. We were all a little subdued. We had had such a happy time together, and eager as I was to go to London, I experienced a sense of regret that I must bid good-bye to my pleasant country companions.

"We shall meet again," I said to Mr. Benson, as he came to put on my cloak at the end of the evening.

"I am afraid not often," he answered, with unmistakable regret in his voice. "Our lives are separated as far as the East is from the West. I shall always look back with pleasure on this episode in my life, and" (with a quick smile) "I will take your warning to heart and try and not grow too narrow."

"An unfinished episode, I hope," I rejoined

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quickly. "Is there such an inseparable gulf between us? Do you draw such a hard-and-fast line between the Church and the world, that we outsiders may never overstep the boundary? I thought that some time or other you would let me bring some friends and give your parishioners a concert, a really nice one."

His face brightened and then fell again.

"You are not infected with the fashionable craze for patronizing poor people?" he inquired doubtfully.

"I think not," I answered, a little hurt. "I made the offer in all good faith. Have you not told me that you should try and bring brightness into the lives of other people?"

"It is very good of you to think of it," he said warmly. "I accept the offer with all gratitude."

"I shall come and see Edith and Miss Benson before very long," I said; "so pray don't try and dismiss me out of your life as the butterfly that has served 'to grace a summer's day.' I believe I quote a Reverend Father correctly?" and I made him a little curtsey.

He laughed.

"I am afraid that was a very unfortunate remark for which I am never to be forgiven," he said.

"Sylvia, are you going to keep me standing here all night?" cried Aunt Annie, who was waiting ready cloaked in the hall, and I flew in response to her call.

I do not know if coming events cast their shadows before, but I was in a curious state of

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depression when I got into the privacy of my bedroom, and indulged in a good fit of crying when I got into bed. I was nervous for the first time in my life, and I felt inclined to re-light my candle, and go down-stairs and bring up my maid to sleep on the sofa in my room. How I wish I had obeyed the instinct, but pride forbade me to do it, and, after an hour of restless tossing, I dropped asleep.

I waked at last with a curious sense of choking. I sprang out of bed with a strange heart-sickening sense of alarm. I groped round helplessly in search of warm wraps, so that I could go down to seek for help. I opened the door on to the staircase, but volumes of smoke greeted me. Gasping, breathless, I banged to the door, not realizing, as I did it, that I was shutting out all hope of escape. One awful fact, that the tower was on fire, blotted out everything else. I believe I lost all my presence of mind in that first minute. I think it would have been just possible for me to get down my corkscrew staircase, and across to the passage window and so out on to the parapet which I looked down upon from my bedroom window, but I had no time to think, and the fire crept upwards, higher and higher. I heard the crackling of it below. I flew to my window and threw it open, and, horror of horrors! I saw all the place lit up by a lurid glow. I could only guess where the fire raged most fiercely by the volumes of smoke that rolled across, sometimes completely blocking the view from me, but I judged that it was the

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worst just beneath my room. I saw groups of people hurrying to and fro. The whole scene is photographed on my mind so that to my dying day I may never forget it, and I thought with a shiver how those happy people below were safe, and I was caught like a rat in a trap. Curious fancies crossed my brain. I wondered if I should be conscious of the pain of dying, or whether I should die painlessly of suffocation. I think my whole soul rose in one cry to the great God to deliver me, one fervent, voiceless prayer, and this gave way again to a feeling of paralysed terror. Would they make no effort to save me, those hurrying crowds below? I leant out of the window, and collecting all my strength, I shouted as I had never shouted before.

"Jem, Jem! *can't* you help me? I am here."

I listened to the confused murmurs below, and then a stentorian voice rang through the air—

"Sylvia, can you hear me? Are you there?"

The voice was Jem's.

"Yes," I shouted back.

"Keep up heart. I will come to save you."

I felt little hope that the promise could be fulfilled. I knew the staircase was impassable. To breathe at all now I had to keep near the window. At present the fire had not touched the walls. It seemed as if I had waited there hours. In reality they told me it was not more than ten minutes before I heard a voice calling to me. It sounded much nearer. There was a man's form on the

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parapet below, but it was not Jem; it was Mr. Benson.

"Miss O'Connor," he said, "the ladders reach here. I can get you safely down from here; but listen. Collect yourself. Our lives may depend on it. I am going to throw something for you to catch. I must wait for the smoke to clear. It is a fishing-reel with a line attached to it. *Don't break the line!* Are you listening?"

"Yes," I said, faintly praying that the dimness in my eyes might clear. Daylight was breaking over the hills, and there was a bright light from the fire within.

"Stretch out your hands as far as you can, and above all things keep steady. Next time the smoke clears I must throw. Are you ready?"

"Yes," I cried again.

"One, two, three—catch!"

I suppose it was the necessity for calmness that kept me steady.

"I have it!" I cried.

"Thank God. Is the line safe?"

"Yes."

"Pull then—very gently—not too fast."

I pulled, and after many yards of thread I found I was drawing up fine twine.

"Faster!" cried the voice.

The twine was attached to a cord.

"Has the rope reached you?"

"Yes," I said.

"You have an iron stanchion in your window. Wind the rope twice round it and knot it as

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strongly as you can. Keep a good long end that you can pull at, so that if the knot should slip you can keep the rope safe. I am coming up the rope to you."

"No," I cried in agony, "not that. I will try and come down the rope."

"Knot it," cried the voice imperatively. "Now hold on to your end tightly, as tight as you can."

I withdrew a yard or two from the window and held on for my very life to the end of the rope. I felt it straining in my grasp. I knew my knot would slip a little, but I would hold on if I died in the effort.

Hand over hand, as I was told afterwards, swinging in space, by painful effort Mr. Benson pulled himself up to my window. It was a miracle of heroism. One slip on my part, or a snap of the rope, and he and I were both lost. He rested on the outer window-sill for a moment breathless, unable to speak. Suddenly there rose from below a deafening shout of congratulation. The crowd knew he had reached me in safety. Cyril Benson gave an answering cheer, and came inside the room. His first action startled me. He wrenched the casements from their hinges; nothing was left but the stanchion in the middle, round which the rope was fastened. He pulled up rapidly the swinging end of the rope below.

"You held on bravely," he said. "Be brave a little longer. I must let you down first. I have cleared the casement for your start. Will you do

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exactly as I tell you? I must tie you into a sort of swing."

He was quickly fastening the seat of a chair into a long noose that he made in the rope.

"I shall let you down on to the parapet below. Don't fear the rope will break, for I am strong and can let you down quietly. Then I shall secure this end of the rope quite safely and come down after you. Don't get giddy. Shut your eyes and say your prayers."

As he talked he was swiftly fastening me into my perilous seat, so that I might not realize the horror of that descent.

"You will hold on with both hands as if you were in a swing. Now I must begin to lower you," and he lifted me, sick and trembling, on to the window-sill, with my feet outside.

"Move yourself off very gently," he cried. "I have the rope. Call to me from time to time."

I was sinking, sinking into space. Would the rope break? Tongues of fire were creeping out of a lower floor window at no great distance, but my swing kept steady.

"Are you nearly down?" Mr. Benson shouted.

"Not far off."

At last my feet rested on the parapet below, and with shaking hands I hastened to untie the handkerchiefs wherewith I had been bound to my seat.

"I am safe. Pull up the rope," I cried.

I looked down below. Compared with the height at which I had been just before it seemed quite near, but it had taken two high ladders

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lashed together to reach thus far. I saw that the fire was drawing near to them. What if we were lost after all? A curious refrain rang through my mind: "Loseth his life—loseth his life—shall find it." I turned to see what had happened to my companion, and felt sick with fear as I saw him swiftly yet cautiously swinging himself down the rope. Very soon he stood by my side.

"We are safe so far, thank God," he ejaculated. The fire shone on his white face as he stood hatless and coatless by me, and I thought how St. Stephen's face once looked as the face of an angel. I noted, too, that his hands were bleeding. It was but an instant that I looked at him, but some things one never forgets.

"I must send you down alone backwards," he said. "I fear the ladders will not bear two at once."

"Not alone," I sobbed. "The fire is close. You may not get down alive. Let us go together."

"You must go alone, my darling, and *instantly*," he said authoritatively. "There, place your feet so. If the smoke chokes you, wait for a moment, but for both our sakes get on as quick as you can."

Step by step downwards, choked, blinded, blackened by smoke, by some miracle I reached the bottom. A deafening cheer greeted me, and I remember no more, for I fainted.

To-day I have been told bit by bit the rest of the story. Poor Jem was the first to start to my rescue, but in his desperation he attempted to scale

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the ladders before they were in safe position, and was hurled with violence to the ground, and for the time being was completely stunned, though he recovered consciousness pretty soon, and is about again to-day. Mr. Benson, who had caught sight of the fire at the Abbey, had saddled a horse and galloped over to the Court, and he insisted on taking Jem's place and trying to reach me, first by the staircase, which was hopeless, and then by the only method that was left. Happily he had brought with him from the Abbey a band of helpers, and a large coil of rope, thinking it might be useful.

The fire-engines from Taunton arrived just after I was rescued, and succeeded in extinguishing the fire before it spread to the larger part of the house. It was confined nearly entirely to the left wing.

It is thought that my maid as she left my room must have let a spark from her candle fly into the heavy curtain which hangs across the archway at the bottom of my staircase, that it smouldered for some hours, and finally burst into flame. This seems the only explanation possible.

I find myself here tended by angel hands. Lady Wylmington is so kind to us all. Aunt Annie has escaped without any ill effects except the terrible nervous shock, as her room was quite uninjured by the fire. I am quite worn out with fatigue and excitement, and Lady Wylmington has asked me to stay here till we move to London on Monday, an invitation I gladly accepted, as I do not yet feel strong enough to face the scene of the fire.

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I am kept to-day on the sofa in her dressing-room. I asked if I might see Mr. Benson, but Lady Wylmington told me very gently that he had stuck to his original intention of returning to London early that morning, and had asked her to say good-bye to me from him. "But I did so want to see him," I cried, on the verge of tears. "I wanted to thank him. How was he? Was he ill? His hands were bleeding," and I shuddered at the bare remembrance.

"He told me to say he was quite well, my dear; you were not to worry at all about him. His hands were a little painful, but they will soon be well. You were sleeping when he left."

Later in the day Jem came to see me. I tried to rise up on my sofa.

"Keep quiet, will you?" he said, a little gruffly, but his eyes were full of tears.

"Dear Jem, I can never thank you," I faltered. "You were ready to risk your life for me."

"But I did not. It fell to the other fellow's luck."

"But your head, Jem; how is it?"

"Oh, bother my head. It is all right. How are you, my dear?"

He had never called me that before.

"I shall be quite well in a day or two," I said.

"I will move you to London as soon as you are fit for it," Jem went on, with a strange air of authority, as if he had the right to order my doings.

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"I want to be quiet for a day or two," I answered. "I want time to think."

"Sylvia," continued Jem, "I went into the library to-day and found your journal tossing about. I am afraid it is the only possession of yours that is saved."

"I don't care a bit about that," I said, a little wearily. "The things I chiefly care for are in London, and I am so thankful to have escaped with my life. I remember I wrote my diary in your room the last time," I said, touching my locked volume. "Thank you for bringing it."

"I am not going to stay. I only came to see if you were all right;" and without a word of warning Jem stooped and kissed me on the forehead, and a great tear splashed on my face.

When he left me I turned my face to the wall, and lay shedding happy tears over the fact that two good men had been willing to sacrifice their lives over little worthless me. I remembered too that Mr. Benson had called me "darling," and was glad that after all I was not to meet him again yet. Yes, I wanted time to think!

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CHAPTER VI

EXTRACTS FROM LADY WYLMINGTON'S NOTE-BOOK

May 16.

MY young people are all out at a picnic, so I have leisure to write and to think. Dr. Trevor is here, and has in part relieved and in part added to my anxiety about Cyril. I can see that he thinks him greatly better in the present, but I can also see that he thought more seriously of the nature of the attack than he wishes Cyril or Dorothy to do; and this adds to my own impression that the fainting fit, and intense headache from which he suffered for a time, might indicate a greater amount of over-strain than can be accounted for by a few months' hard work. However, I trust this entire change and period of rest will do much for him. I see him better and brighter day by day, and I shall not allow myself to despond, although the fact that both father and mother

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died in young middle life makes me the more uneasy.

He came to me last night with notes in his hand of a pamphlet or leaflet which he was preparing in answer to an attack on Infant Baptism which had been written by a leading Dissenter in his parish, and I was thus able to enter, as I hadn't been able to do when he was mentally unfit for discussion, into the question which had disturbed me in hearing his somewhat excited talk during the first days of his visit. He read me his notes, and we discussed the terms in which they were written. It was just such a paper as I should have wished my boy to write on such a subject, and, as I was able to tell him with all my heart, he was right in answering that other pamphlet. He was not then "attacking Dissenters," as he had sometimes spoken of doing—a thing which grieved me in Cyril—but defending a doctrine of the Catholic Church which had been attacked by another, and which it was his duty to defend to the uttermost. I had only to suggest a few softening phrases, and it is wonderful how my young St. George permits me to speak to him, and takes a word of counsel and even of implied rebuke from his old grandmother, when so many young men of his powers and force of character would resent the least hint of such a thing.

We had a very beautiful and comforting talk after that, and I found that my boy was more at one with me (when the battle-spirit of controversy was laid aside) than I had thought a short

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time since. It is beautiful to see how his love goes out towards all men—even his enemies—when his truer and better self speaks through the crust of gathering reserve. I found him quite at one with me in the longing after the peace and unity of faith wherein alone true hope for the world is to be found.

Well, I must not prose on about our conversation; but it left me very happy—happy that I and my boy were still in such accord, happy that he still gave me such confidence and love. When I see him with others—see him in society, particularly in the society of women—I cannot but smile to observe how little he lets appear of his depths of tenderness and sympathy. There is a gentle austerity about him, an air of aloofness—for want of a better word—which impresses the inexperienced beholder with the idea that he is rather a formidable being. And he can be formidable in good earnest when he is roused. There is a lion-like spirit within him which is easily awakened if he suspects a spirit of frivolity or of mockery in those with whom he speaks. I can see that he flashes out sometimes even upon Sylvia—who nevertheless fascinates him almost more than I could wish—if he thinks any of her pretty, half-random talk verges too closely upon thoughtlessness or levity. I cannot help liking to see them together, even though I am not sure it is without peril that they meet so frequently and gravitate together as they do. Her sweet, arch playfulness, with its flashes of deeper feeling, and

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the sense of potentialities in her nature, which intercourse with her always suggests, has an extraordinary attraction for me—I do not deny it—and I can see that it affects Cyril just in the same way. Then she can appreciate the loftiness and nobility in his nature even whilst she does not understand it, and when at times she shrinks from it and draws herself away from its influence, as it were, with an access of something akin to fear. But she cannot keep away long, and after a little outbreak of wild gaiety—which is her relief from threatened tension of feeling—her eyes will seek his again, as if to read whether she has shocked him, whether he has condemned her, whether she may return and exercise her witchery upon him then and there, or must await another opportunity. Not that she ever flirts or even tries to flirt with him. Her fascination is absolutely and entirely unconscious. It is impossible to her not to try and please, not to desire to give pleasure to all about her. She admires and reveres Cyril. He is to her a type of something grand and lofty, the embodiment of a certain nobility and spirituality which has hitherto not come into her life, and which attracts her without her exactly knowing it. She talks of him to me constantly, asks me about him when he was a child, says little things which show me that the devotion and self-sacrifice of his life are mysteries to her which she cannot but think of and puzzle over. It is not the handsome exterior which fascinates her imagination, but the truer and deeper self—the personality of

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the man—the instinctive sense that there is a something in his nature beyond her present ken, which she longs after without knowing what it is. I suppose, poor child, that the spiritual side of her nature has never been developed in her intercourse with those about her. There is a vein of deep devotion within her. I guessed it from the questions she asked me almost the first day I really made her acquaintance. I knew it better after I had spoken to her, as I could not have done had there been no answering faith in her soul. Since that day she has come to me more than once for a little counsel; and her question often turns upon this point, "What would Mr. Benson say I ought to do?" I wonder if there is peril in the situation growing up between them. It might do much for both—softening him and spiritualizing her; but if it goes beyond friendship—ah! then I should almost fear. Our consolation in these things is that the issue is in other Hands, and that God's purposes work out in ways unknown and unseen by us.

May 22.—I have had much to think of these last few days. It has come to a climax with Dorothy at last. I always felt it would do so when Cyril had a parish of his own, although I confess that had it not been for Edith Wingfield's sudden development (sudden to me, though I believe not to herself) there would have been very many more difficulties in the way than there have proved to be as it is.

I have known for long that Dorothy's present

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life is not a happy or congenial one. Dorothy has never opened her heart to me as Cyril has always done. She is a wonderfully reserved and self-contained little mortal, and I sometimes wonder whether her brother's very affection towards me is not something of a pain to her. It is hardly well in this world for one frail human being to love another with the passionate absorption with which Dorothy loves Cyril. She only lives in him and for him. I do not think he is ever out of her thoughts. I believe she would be glad to die for him to save him from the smallest pain or trouble. If ever woman made an idol of another being, Dorothy has made one of Cyril; and, like all one-sided affections, it has stunted and dwarfed her development in other directions. She has grudged every bit of love given away from Cyril—as though, poor child, love were a measurable quality of which each human heart only possessed a certain quantity! I sometimes even fear that he has taken in her heart that first love which is not ours by right to give to any creature. At least her devotion to him has had the effect of shutting her out more or less from all the world besides, and her life has been a very lonely one, although she has never lived alone. Her so-called home is in London with her father's relations, and as long as Cyril is within reach she would never complain, although I do not think she has been very happy. I often think her increasingly shy, or rather reserved, when she comes to visit me; certainly she does not talk to me freely; and it has only been by a hint now and then that I

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have known how earnestly she has been desiring to work under Cyril in his parish, when he is able to arrange any organization of lay-helpers.

I think it must have been settled in part at the picnic; for upon the following day Cyril came and asked to speak with me, and I saw by his face that he had much to say. He told me that Dorothy and Edith Wingfield had made up their minds—and that Edith had even obtained her father's consent—to go and establish themselves in Cyril's parish as lay-helpers amongst the poor, forming perhaps the nucleus of one of those bands of devoted women-workers who are doing such noble work amongst the suffering poor. He told me that to him the relief of having two such women to send amongst his sick would be immense; but before going into any detail, or even exactly considering the matter from his own standpoint, he wished to know what I thought of it, and whether I approved it for Dorothy.

I was not altogether unprepared for the announcement, nor did Edith's move, sudden as it appeared, take me entirely by surprise. With her case, however, I had nothing to do. Her parents were the judges there, and they, it seemed, had given consent provided that Dorothy and she could live together in some suitable place. Even as regards Dorothy I had no real jurisdiction. She was of age. She had a comfortable income of her own. She was free to choose her own life, and she was certainly not young for her years. If ever a girl was free from family ties and home

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duties that girl was Dorothy; and if a woman of six-and-twenty deliberately makes up her mind to a vocation, I think she probably knows what she is about. Dorothy and Edith, at any rate, knew something of the step they contemplated, and were not proposing a headstrong leap in the dark.

"They are very much in earnest," said Cyril almost pleadingly; "I have put everything before them—the hardness, the bareness, the sordidness (in one sense of the word) of the life, and the isolation from everything else. But it does not daunt them in the least. Miss Wingfield, it seems, has been thinking of some such work for years, and looks upon it, I verily believe, as an answer to prayer that her way should suddenly have opened like this. And as for Dorothy——"

He paused, and we both smiled. There was no need to pursue the theme of Dorothy's sentiments.

"If Edith takes it in that spirit, and if her parents approve, I think there is no reason to doubt the call. I believe they will be happy in their work, and I trust they will both give and receive a blessing. I will do what I can to forward the scheme. I should like to talk to Dr. Trevor a little about some of the material and physical aspects of the case. You say that he is behind the scenes too?"

"Yes, he knew it before I did. I will send him to you. I am thankful you approve the step. I should have bowed to your judgment had you said it would be too great a trial of strength, or too great a strain upon the life and spirit of young women to lead such a life; but I confess it would

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have been a bitter disappointment. I have so set my heart upon getting around me some organization of workers amongst my women. And we cannot do that till women—good women—and gently-nurtured women—will come forward and help us."

Cyril went away with a brightness of face and a buoyancy of step which showed how greatly his burden would be lessened by willing helpers; and Dr. Trevor came and talked to me about the neighbourhood and its physical and sanitary conditions, and the possibility of obtaining a decent house in the neighbourhood of the church which could be made suitable for the reception of two tenderly-nurtured girls. I knew they would not think of these matters themselves, but Dr. Trevor cordially agreed with me on all points. If they liked to live without luxuries, without carpets on their floors or pictures on their walls, that was their own affair—it is the fashion of the day in a certain school to think that the higher life can be better led in an atmosphere of asceticism. But at least the house should be clean, the drainage should be as perfect as possible, the rooms well ventilated, and their attendant thoroughly and unimpeachably respectable. I talked all these things over with Dr. Trevor, telling him that I would willingly rent a good house in the neighbourhood of the church (or buy it if it were in the market) to put at the disposal of Cyril's lay-helpers, but that it must be sanitary, clean, and properly ordered before I could approve the girls entering upon their life there;

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and he promised to make it his first concern on his return to seek out such a place. He thought he knew one answering the description, and he was most kind and thoughtful and sensible in all his remarks. We parted excellent friends a day or two afterwards. I am very glad he has been down. I shall feel more at ease about Cyril, knowing him to be in good hands, and I can at any time write direct to——

May 30.—I think I never before closed my book with an unfinished sentence. The reason for doing so I must now explain. I was writing late at night, as is often my habit, when I heard a hasty step along the corridor, and I went to my door to see who it could be at such an hour. To my surprise I saw Cyril hastening towards the head of the staircase, a look of intense anxiety and excitement upon his face.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

He started and turned towards me quickly.

"A fire at the Court," he answered; "I was awakened by the glow in the sky. It must be a bad one. I fear that *she* is in peril. I must go to her. Don't stop me!" He was speaking like a man under some strong compulsion—like one who is going straight to a certain spot in response to an urgent call. He never paused, and I had to follow him down the stairs as we spoke.

"You will ride there, Cyril. Don't try to run that distance. You will do it faster on horseback. Bonner sleeps over the stables. He will saddle you a horse in a few minutes."

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"Thank you," he said, "I had not thought of that; but it will be quicker in the end, as you say."

"And order out the carriage too," I said, as I saw the red light in the sky through the hall window; "I will follow you there."

He was gone almost before I had done speaking, but I knew that he would not forget my order. I heard the sound of galloping horse-hoofs as I put on my outer wraps, and the carriage came round as soon as I could reasonably expect it. I had by that time roused some of the household, and had ordered them to be prepared for the reception of guests in the small hours of the night. I thought it highly probable we might have to shelter Mrs. Carew and Sylvia for the night. Fire and water make terrible havoc of a house even when the damage is not extreme, and Mrs. Carew's nerves would probably be considerably shaken.

Although I did not anticipate loss of life or even deadly peril, there is always something strangely moving and thrilling in the approach to a burning building. The fire had plainly got some considerable hold on the Court, and the lurid glare became so great as we approached that at length the horses refused to proceed, and grew so restive when urged that I ordered Bonner to draw up behind a clump of trees in the park, and proceeded the rest of the way upon foot.

I shall never forget the sight presented by the familiar house as I passed beyond the sheltering belt of shrubs and trees and came into full view of

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the building. The fire was confined to one corner of the house—to the west wing—indeed almost to the tower itself. That was blazing up into a pyramid of lambent flame against the solemn blackness of the sky; and there upon the parapet—outlined as it were by a sheet of flame behind him—was a human figure; and instinct, rather than sight or reason, told me in one second that it was Cyril who was there!

A shower of sparks flew upwards—a great rolling cloud of smoke hid everything from view. Before it had cleared away a ringing cheer rose above the crackle of the flames, and as I hastened towards the scene of action Cyril came forward out of the smoke and reek, his face deadly white beneath the mask of smuts, his dress torn, singed and dishevelled, his hands bleeding and scorched; but in his eyes there was a luminous brightness and brilliance not quite like anything I had ever seen there before, and upon his lips there was only one word—

"Sylvia!—is she safe?"

Well, I need not tell all that story. It will be ancient history in the place before long. That gallant rescue was witnessed by half the village, and I have heard the tale from a score of different spectators. I had Sylvia carried to the carriage in an unconscious state. Mrs. Carew, in a condition bordering on hysteric frenzy, followed us, and her son implored me to take his mother away, as he could do nothing whilst she was there clinging to him, hindering him from directing the efforts to

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extinguish the fire, and unnerving everybody about her. The young man's face was very set and white. He looked like one who has received a blow more severe than one from any falling timber. But I had no time to do more then than accede to his request. We left one servant to help at the Court. Cyril went on the box, and we three women drove home together, Sylvia still quite unconscious. Mrs. Carew sobbed out her incoherent yet graphic description of the girl's awful peril as we drove home; and I was not sorry under the circumstances that she remained unconscious till after we had got her to bed, and that even when she came to her senses she went off into the sleep of exhaustion almost before she had had time to realize her surroundings or recollect what had happened to her.

Then I went to my boy, who was in his room looking very worn out and pale, but quite himself, and anxious for news of Sylvia.

"She will do very well if kept quite quiet to recover from the shock. With her that is all the injury. But you, Cyril, is there more amiss with you? Tell me frankly, are you really hurt?"

"I believe not—not that I am aware of, except that my hands are cut with the rope. They ought not to be so soft—I must do some more rowing when I have time. You ought to have seen her in that awful peril!—her perfect calmness and child-like trust. It was the most beautiful thing I have ever known. If she had hesitated, or argued, or resisted, it would have been death to us both.

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But there was not the least fear or shrinking. It was the perfect faith of the little child. I think it will be a lesson to me for life;" and into his eyes there crept a beautiful look, which I could not altogether interpret.

He let me bind up his hands, which were raw and painful; but I do not think he felt the pain. His thoughts were not with himself. As I had finished, he bent his head and kissed me.

"I have been so happy here," he said, looking, with that direct gaze of his, as he used to do as a child when any wonderful new idea of the wideness and depth and grandeur of life presented itself to his vision. "It has done me good—more good than you will ever quite know. But I must go back to London to-morrow. This must be my farewell."

I looked at him. I was about to remonstrate, but a glance in his face told me two things; one that remonstrance would be useless, another that he was right—that he had better go.

So he went—went the following morning; and when I met the sweet, wistful glance of Sylvia's eyes, when first she was able to think and speak, and to recall what had happened, I was glad that it was so. The events of that night—of that common and awful peril—had produced upon both a profound impression. It might be one that would last for ever—with him I was almost sure it would be so, but with her? Ah! there lay the peril. She was so young, so ardent, so keenly sensitive to outward influences; at the moment

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everything was so intensely real. But would the impression last? or would it be effaced by others following upon it? Looking at her, watching and studying her, I was often reminded of a brilliant shot silk, which in one light looks one colour, and in another takes a perfectly different complexion. Both are absolutely genuine, both are the very nature of the texture, but oh, how different to the eye!

Mrs. Carew was fetched away by her son, who wanted her at home in consultation, but Sylvia was left with me. She was hardly fit to be removed, for one thing; and for another, it was thought far better that she should not see the Court again till after she had been to London to finish her season there. That flitting was to take place the following Monday (to-day, in fact, they have all left Monckton), and till then Sylvia was left with me, to my own satisfaction, and, I think, to hers.

I put her into my dressing-room, so that she should not feel solitary at night, and by day she lay mostly on the sofa, weak, and a little feverish, but more thoughtful, sweet, and gentle than I have seen her as yet.

On Friday, as I was sitting beside her, she suddenly put out her hand, with her pretty, caressing gesture, and said—

"Lady Wylmington, I want to do two things before I go back to the world again."

"Yes, my dear; and what are they?"

"I want to return thanks on Sunday in church

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for being saved in that awful fire, and I want to write to Cyril and thank him, and ask him to think of me in *his* church when he returns thanks for everything in the service. Please may I?"

That trusting, childlike confidence and appeal of which Cyril had spoken struck me powerfully then. I do not think that Sylvia even knew that she had called him by his name to me. There was no consciousness of self about her at that moment. Her heart was full of a child's gratitude towards the Heavenly Father Who had watched over her in the hour of deadly peril, and towards the man whom He had surely sent to her aid at that time. There was something so sweet and lovely in her whole aspect, that I could only bend my head and kiss her as I answered—

"My child, I am truly glad that you wish to offer your thanks where they are due . . . to God first, and then to the one who was surely sent by Him. Perhaps that searching experience has been sent to you in love and in warning. You are about to enter into a life of much brightness and some temptation. Perhaps the memory of that night will help to keep you in remembrance that this world and its pleasures will pass away; but that beyond the grave and gate of death lies our unchanging and unchangeable inheritance where our hearts and our hopes should be fixed."

The tears sprang to her eyes in a moment.

"Oh, I will try to remember! I will try to remember!" she cried, and taking my hand, and carrying it to her lips, she added, with the most

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childlike sweetness and appeal, "I do so want to be good. And you will help me, will you not? You are so good yourself—like Cyril."

The last word was almost a whisper. I am not sure if it was meant to reach my ears; and yet I do not believe the child had any thought in her heart she would not have spoken to me had I pressed her.

The service of yesterday is very present with me as I write—the glorious sunshine without, the solemn, coloured dimness within our little quaint old church, the shafts of crimson and purple fire streaming in through the south windows, and falling full upon Sylvia's white draperies as she knelt with bowed head and clasped hands, her whole soul filled with a rapture of thanksgiving that was written in every line of her lovely face.

The church was very full that day. I think everybody was eager to catch a glimpse of the heroine of the fire; but Sylvia was beautifully unconscious of the fact that she was the central object of interest. I think I had never seen her look so lovely before as she did that day—more brilliant and beautiful often, but not so truly lovely. There were still shadows under her eyes, her cheeks had not got back their wonted bloom, although the fitful colour came and went with every varying emotion. She was very simply dressed in pure white, with a great white hat and drooping feathers, and a little cluster of late banksia roses at her throat. But one could not pause to think of her dress. It was the beautiful look of peace and

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thankful trust upon her face which held mine in thrall when I glanced at her from time to time to be sure she was strong enough to go through with it. I shall always remember the pose of that bent head as the clergyman gave forth that "Sylvia O'Connor desired to return thanks to Almighty God for deliverance from a great danger," and then the wonderful brightness of the upward glance towards the east window as the familiar words fell on our ears, "We bless Thee for our creation, preservation——"

As we came out from church she kept very close to my side, and I was glad that I had ordered the carriage to meet us, contrary to my usual custom on Sunday. The child had been through almost too much. Her lips were quivering, and I could see a crystal drop falling on her hand as we drove off. But she did not speak more than once, and it was with a close pressure of her fingers upon mine as we sat side by side, and in a voice that quivered and broke, she whispered—

"I am sure *he* was thinking of us. I am sure *he* gave thanks too."

To-day they went off to London by the morning train. May God's grace and blessing be with her through the ordeal which lies before her now.

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CHAPTER VII

WORK IN ST. CHADS

IT needed a strong mental effort on Cyril Benson's part to pull himself together after the events related in the last few chapters. Events had occurred in the few weeks of his holiday that would certainly serve to colour the rest of his life, and in some cases alter his views of it; for there was no questioning the fact that he had fallen in love with Sylvia O'Connor, that the image of her was ever present with him, that he viewed his scarred hands with positive satisfaction because the scars had been won in her service. Not that to him marriage seemed a greater probability than it had ever been. He knew that Sylvia was out of his reach, he had not the slightest intention of ever proposing to her; for marriage, like everything else, must be subordinate to his work. He knew that she looked at life from a completely different standpoint. Had not he her word for it?

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"I should look forward to such a life with loathing and dread." The words were stamped on his heart for ever. Truly he himself had suffered. Yet Cyril's love for Sylvia was a new and valued possession, that had shed a glory over his life of which, until now, he had known nothing. He realized that if he had been able to claim it and make it his own, his work in St. Chads would have been helped, not hindered; that a woman's tenderer touch might assuage many a sorrow that a man's rougher hand must leave alone. For a little time, Cyril gave himself up to the luxury of dreaming what life might have been with Sylvia at his side. He knew that in a day or two he must turn down this leaf in his life for ever, but at present the beautiful tempting vision still dazzled his eyes. I do not think he suffered much in these days. The glamour of his love made life very beautiful. The suffering came later when he tried to rouse himself. He made very light of the fire and his rescue of Sylvia to Dr. Trevor and the Brotherhood, and to outward semblance he went about his daily work with the same energy as ever. He had asked Dorothy to write him a line at once to tell him how Sylvia recovered from the shock of the fire, and the day after his return he received a note from his sister telling him that Sylvia was well, although naturally much exhausted from the fright of the fire. "Grandmother is keeping her up-stairs to-day, but to-morrow I think she will be about again as usual." Cyril pushed the note from him impatiently. Surely Dorothy could

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have afforded to go a little more into detail, and not wasted the time by filling up the rest of the letter with needless inquiries after himself. On Saturday came a letter from Sylvia herself. Cyril glanced at the writing and slipped it into his pocket. He was not strong enough yet to read a letter from Sylvia unless he was quite alone, and it arrived when the Brotherhood were at their simple mid-day meal. Later on he took it out and opened it. The writing was irregular, the paper blistered here and there with tears.

"*Monckton Court, May —.*

"MY DEAR MR. BENSON,

"I scarcely know how to write to you or how to thank you. One can find words to thank people for an ordinary gift; but there are no words that are strong enough to express the gratitude one feels to a man who has saved one's life at the risk of his own, and that is what you have done for me. I must be indebted to you all my life, and yet, strange to say, I do not feel this debt a burden. I accept this great gift gratefully at your hands, and, please God, my life shall be the worthier for its redemption. This, I think, is all the reward you will desire. Perhaps this is the first and last letter I may ever write you, the only time I shall ever feel the right to say what I like, so may I tell you that I am the better for having met you, that you have deepened my view of life, and given me fresh thoughts of God and of holy things, that far off, very far off,

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I catch occasional glimpses of what you meant by the only sermon I ever heard you preach, 'He that loseth his life shall save it.' I think on the night of the fire you offered me a practical illustration of the text. Dear Lady Wylmington allows me to remain here till Monday. Aunt Annie has gone back to the Court, as there is a good deal to arrange there before we go to London on Monday. I think I am hardly yet strong enough to face the scene of the fire, and I need not add how thankful I am to be left under your grandmother's care. She is goodness itself to me. On Sunday I return thanks in the little church here that I so dearly love for my marvellous escape. May I ask you to think of me then, and not only to thank God for our escape, but to pray for me that I may be better? I shall be pleased if you can find time to send me a line to tell me that your hands are well again.

"Believe me, now and always,
"Your grateful friend,
"SYLVIA O'CONNOR."

Cyril read and re-read the letter. Yes, he would answer it, but not to-day. To-morrow, in all his services, all his prayers, Sylvia should be the predominant note of thanksgiving. Until to-morrow night they should belong to each other, and then their lives must separate. She must go her way and he his, and the lines must not touch. Ah! willingly they must not touch. He could not bear the pain

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of it, and the only difference in his life must be that Sylvia's name would have a place in his prayers, her image a place in his heart. It must not often be looked at, but it would be safely there.

Such was Cyril's firm resolve as he folded Sylvia's letter and replaced it in his pocket. He put aside the notes that he had prepared for his evening sermon. They did not suit his mood. To-morrow was Sylvia's day. Quite suddenly the thought came to him that for the sake of the woman that he loved he must try to deliver some special message to the women of his congregation. He felt as if he had never fully understood women and their several needs before. When he first came to St. Chads the church had been nearly empty, but now on Sunday nights there was often a very large congregation; at present women predominated, but Cyril did not despair. The wives would perhaps some day bring their husbands. That Sunday was a glorified Sunday, a note of triumphant gladness rang through all the services, or at least so it appeared to Cyril in his exalted mood. It was with a distinct shock of surprise that the Brotherhood listened to the text that Cyril gave out for his evening sermon: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. But let it be the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Cyril's fellow-workers settled themselves in their seats and prepared to listen. It was indeed a new start for

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their leader to take it into his head to preach to women, and a slight but involuntary smile crossed their features.

"My friends," Cyril began, "as I look down on my congregation to-night, I see among you the faces of many more women than men. To them and to them only I wish to speak to-night. God gives us sometimes a message to the body collectively, and sometimes to the individual members of that body. I plead for the special attention of the mothers, the wives, the daughters of my flock, for I have a special message for them. Listen, I pray you, to the words of an inspired Apostle."

The preacher paused. Every woman's and girl's head in the congregation was turned towards him. Some of the men crept noiselessly from the church, while others felt that they might lawfully compose themselves for a comfortable nap. Certainly that night Cyril had not to complain of the inattention of his women, as with glowing words he sketched before them their possible work and influence in the world. He tried to drive it home to each of them in turn. He reminded the mothers of the beautiful but awful responsibility of children—he spoke of Samuel, and said that doubtless his character and the wonderful influence that he exercised in the world were mainly due to his mother's prayers; and in simple but stirring language he told the legend of S. Augustine and Monica, showing that even a son sunk in vice and iniquity may be redeemed by the mother of meek and quiet spirit. Then he passed on to the wives.

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To them he quoted Abigail as the typical example of what a wife should be—the sweet, gracious, courteous woman, who by her ready tact and kindly manner can often efface the churlish ill-nature of her husband. And last of all he turned to the daughters, the girls of his congregation, and to them he spoke with almost awful solemnity. He reminded them of their gifts, of their youth, their influence over their brothers, and outside their homes over other men, and he told them boldly that one good woman made many good men. Many a girl's hardened face softened as she listened to the preacher, and down the faces of the older women tears stole silently, and were furtively wiped away. I think that many of the homes in St. Chads were gentler and happier in the ensuing week from the words that were spoken in church that night.

Cyril answered Sylvia's letter before he retired to rest in a few simple, kindly lines. Then he laid aside her note reverently in his library table.

"Benson, can you give me a few minutes' attention, or are you busy?" asked Dr. Trevor a day or two afterwards, walking into Cyril's library without any preliminary knock at the door.

"Ten minutes, if you like," said Cyril, looking up from his writing with a smile.

"I think I have found the lodging that will suit your new volunteers—your sister, and Miss Wingfield—and the woman to look after them. They are very brave-hearted at present, but I think they hardly realize what is before them. I listened

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with becoming gravity to Miss Wingfield's statement that she was a quarter of a century old, but even a girl of her mature years will be glad of the protection of a motherly, respectable landlady."

"Certainly," said Cyril, grateful for the trouble his friend was taking in the matter. "Who is your treasure?"

"A widow who has seen better days, with a front-room and two bedrooms to let, clean and tolerably airy. She asked me if I knew of two single gentlemen who would be away at their business all day, only returning at night. I mildly represented that single gentlemen do not, for choice, come to live at St. Chads, and I asked if she had thought about ladies. Her respectable countenance fell, and she said reprovingly that there 'wern't no ladies' in St. Chads. She evidently felt I was making fun of her."

"And what was the issue of it all?" inquired Cyril, with a laugh.

"That I am to take you, when I can catch you, to see those rooms and pronounce judgment. Happily they are close at hand, in Filey Street."

"I will come at once. It is good of you to take so much trouble, Trevor."

"I believe they will do very well," said Cyril to the landlady, Mrs. Hewitt; "but before I finally decide I think I must ask my grandmother to come and look at them. She knows more of ladies' requirements than I do. I am sure a great inducement to bring them here will be in the fact of your being so well able to look after them;"

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and with a pleasant smile Dr. Trevor and Cyril departed.

"That was really politic of you, Benson. I could see Mrs. Hewitt deciding that any relation of such a pleasant-spoken gentleman should be well looked after."

That night Cyril despatched a note to Lady Wylmington at her London house, asking her to name an early day on which she could come and inspect the lodgings that they had found for the girls, and suggesting that if possible they should accompany her, and judge for themselves. An early day in the following week was named, and Cyril stayed at home in readiness to receive his guests.

"It seems like a breath of country air to get you all here," he said, with a contented sigh, as he led the way into his library. He spoke to them all, but his face turned eagerly to his grandmother.

"And you keep well, dear fellow? You are not overworking yourself again?" and she stretched out her hand to his.

He took it and squeezed it.

"I am quite well, and very thankful to be back. Is Miss O'Connor in town, and can you tell me how she is? I hope she has recovered from the shock of the fire, and poor Mrs. Carew also."

He spoke with rather an effort, Lady Wylmington thought; so she hastened to tell him that both Mrs. Carew and Sylvia were well.

"I saw Sylvia to-day," broke in Edith Wingfield eagerly. "She looked as beautiful as ever, only

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a trifle paler than usual, and she is already in a vortex of gaiety. She was very excited when I told her we were coming to look at our lodgings, and she sent her very kindest regards to you and wanted to know if your hands were well."

"Thank you," answered Cyril gravely. "It was kind of her to think of them;" but Lady Wylmington noticed that he neither answered the message nor the inquiry.

"Will you come and interview your future landlady first, or have tea?" Cyril asked, turning to Dorothy. "I accept it as a foregone conclusion that you will not turn up your noses at the rooms, poor though they be, for I verily believe there is not another hole or corner in St. Chads where I could bestow you."

"I should like to go at once if the others are willing," Dorothy answered.

Certainly the rooms were stuffy that hot June afternoon. The sitting-room looked out on to a noisy, dusty street, where bits of newspaper and other extraneous matter littered the pavement, and the bedroom windows looked out on the back premises of mean little houses very like the one they were inspecting. It was all rather sordid and grimy.

"I am afraid it is a poor place for ladies like you," said Mrs. Hewitt apologetically.

She was quite overawed by Lady Wylmington's title and equipage, and felt her chances of a "good let" fading into the dim distance.

"I don't think we can do better than try these

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rooms and see how we all get on together," said Dorothy, touching Lady Wylmington on the arm. Edith was struggling to find something pleasant to say, and could not in honesty say it.

"It is a question you two must decide for yourselves," said Lady Wylmington gently. "My own opinion is that a little paint and fresh paper would make the rooms quite different from what they appear at present, and I would gladly have it done for you."

Edith's flagging spirits revived at this suggestion. Hitherto she had been all for bareness and asceticism, but now a desire for something bright and homelike stirred within her. Surely they might and should make of their little home an oasis of warmth and light in this strange dreary desert.

"Oh, thank you, so much! That would make everything different, and I know at home they want to give me so many things for my room. I said 'No,' at first, but I think I will change my mind. I shall want a little of home here, after all."

"I think so, my dear," answered Lady Wylmington, her hand upon the girl's shoulder. "You will soon be so interested in your work that you will forget a great deal of the bareness and the discomfort; but it will be better not to make the plunge more severe than it need be at the outset. You will not work less well for feeling that at home you have those little simple comforts to which you have been used. Devotion to a noble cause is not really shown by despising those good gifts which God has given to us."

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Dorothy was already arranging details with Mrs. Hewitt, Lady Wylmington leaving her absolutely free to do as she thought best, and only giving an occasional hint or suggestion when appealed to by one or another. Then they turned homewards through the hot stuffy streets, Dorothy leading the way with Cyril, and Edith bringing up the rear with Lady Wylmington, her heart heavy and glad at the same time, and so full that she was half afraid to speak lest the tears should come.

Lady Wylmington seemed to divine the substance of her thoughts.

"We never quite realize what we have undertaken till we are brought into touch with facts," she said quietly; "and the facts you have now to face are, in their physical conditions, some of the grimmest the world has to show. Does your heart misgive you, Edith?"

"No," she answered bravely and unhesitatingly, although there was just a momentary pause before the monosyllable was spoken; then, after a brief silence, she went on impetuously, "You are quite right in what you are thinking of me, Lady Wylmington. I didn't know before, I had not realized what it would really be like. I have only seen London from the Oxford and Regent Street side. I *knew* that of course it would not be like that here: that there would be dirt and misery and squalor above anything I had seen before; but somehow it had not come home to me. I had pictured myself going about with Dorothy, amongst the sick and dying in their own homes, and I am

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almost sure that will not shock me, however awful those homes may be; but I had *not* thought of the details of our own life—rooms like those, a street like that—the sordidness coming into the very sanctuary of one's own home. I fancy I had a vague idea of a Sister of Mercy's cell—everything bare and ascetic, but with an ecclesiastical charm, something like what Mr. Benson has in his clergy-house. But when it came to three little lodging-rooms, and yellow gauze, all fly-marked, and woollen mats!—oh, it sounds too foolish and childish to put it all into words; but you understand, don't you?"

"Perfectly, my dear. Those little details are very trying, they seem to take the grace and the dignity and the loftiness out of life; but remember it is only *seems*. And remember too, Edith, that perhaps these little rooms are only a stepping-stone to a house, a place of your own, to be modelled after your own likings. If this experiment succeeds; if you and Dorothy can stand the life; if Cyril lives to succeed in organizing a band of workers round him, perhaps there will be the Sisters of Mercy and their proper home in connection with St. Chads before very long. Small beginnings sometimes lead to great results. It may be so with this effort of yours and Dorothy's. Who knows?"

"Ah, Lady Wylmington, now you give me my courage all back again!" cried Edith, with her enthusiasm all alight in a moment. "I feel ashamed to think what a coward I was just now. Dorothy was not——"

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"Dorothy knew what she was undertaking beforehand," answered Lady Wylmington, with a smile and a very small sigh too; "Dorothy is no stranger to St. Chads; and then with Dorothy the magnet is Cyril. She is perfectly in earnest; but it is for Cyril she will work—not just for the sake of the work. If Cyril were removed to another sphere, Dorothy would go with him there. Your life, Edith, is dedicated to a cause—Dorothy's to a man."

"I know," answered Edith gravely; "Dorothy says so herself. She has said so all along. But she is longing to come—to begin, and so am I. I think I want it more than ever after what I have seen, although it did almost make a coward of me for a moment. I have wanted all my life to do some work for God; and oh, I am longing from the bottom of my heart to do it here!"

Her voice quivered and broke; she had been through much mental strain that day, and it was all she could do to restrain a sob.

Lady Wylmington's touch upon her arm was at once soothing and reassuring; they had almost reached the clergy-house by this time.

"We will go with Cyril to Evensong at the church before we go home," was all she said, but the words quieted Edith in a moment. She knew all that was implied by them.

Cyril's face was a little anxious as he turned to the second pair.

"I think I did not know how sordid it must all appear to you until I had you there," he said to

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Lady Wylmington, whilst the girls passed on before them into the sitting-room. "Do you think they can stand it? Do you think it is right they should?"

"I think they will be very happy there when once they have begun their work. It is not a place in which to lead an idle life, certainly; but it will do well enough for them to make the start in. Later on we can decide whether or not to think of that other and larger scheme we have discussed once before. But for the present they will be reasonably comfortable with Mrs. Hewitt, and that is almost more than they asked at the outset!"

Cyril played the host over the tea-table, and the girls discussed their prospects with some animation. Edith's courage had all come back, although there was now and then a quivering of the lips which betrayed the emotion she kept bravely in check. The lesson of that afternoon was one not quickly to be effaced, though perhaps it had done more to brace and strengthen her than had her ideals been less rudely crushed by grim reality.

The bell was ringing for Evensong as they rose from the table, and with one accord they moved across the intervening space to the church. Here at least was beauty and peace. The church, like most in crowded localities, was rather dark, the coloured glass and the proximity of other buildings combining to dim the light which stole through the windows; but after the garish,

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dusty sunshine of the streets, the cool shadow and hush of this sacred place sank with a beautiful and soothing solemnity upon the spirit. The dim lamps in the sanctuary shed around a chastened glow, while the western sun brought into prominence the rood upon the chancel screen. Soft notes from the organ made a harmony of sound, and the tumult of the streets was no longer heard or remembered.

"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." Such was the thought in Edith's heart as she knelt in her place with bowed head and clasped hands, remembering the experiences of that afternoon, and full of earnest longings for strength and wisdom and guidance in the task she was about to take up. The familiar service made a golden link, as it seemed, between the life she had left behind and the one she was about to take up. After all, was it not the same service to which she was dedicated?

"Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord." The words fell upon her ears in Cyril's clear, full tones, and it seemed as though a shaft of light penetrated her heart at the moment, chasing away the last lingering shadow of fear. Had she not come into this dark place, even as he had done, to strive to bring God's light into it, amid so much that was sad and gloomy? Her eyes met Dorothy's as they rose from their knees at last, and they passed out into the street hand in hand.

It was a sort of quiet recognition of the fact that

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henceforth they were to be fellow-workers. Three weeks later Lady Wylmington's carriage again drew up at the shabby house in Filey Street, which nevertheless was wonderfully smartened up, both outside and in, by its new coatings of paint, and this time two girls in neat black dresses, cloaks, and bonnets descended and proceeded to give orders about the disposal of their bag and baggage. Mrs. Hewitt, in her best bib-and-tucker, came out to welcome her lodgers, and thus simply, with no parade or fuss, Dorothy Benson and Edith Wingfield took up their abode at St. Chads as lay-helpers and district-visitors.

"You are breaking faith with me, Benson. You took no day off last week that I know of. Where is your conscience, I should like to know?" said Dr. Trevor, stopping Cyril in the street one Monday morning.

"Wrong again, my dear fellow," said Cyril, with a smile. "I dined at Lady Wylmington's last Thursday night. I took my choir to the Crystal Palace the week before that——"

"That is *not* a day off," interrupted Dr. Trevor.

"Silence, if you please, till I have finished my story. To-day I take our organist and six young fellows out of my Bible-class, who all have a very strongly developed feeling for art, to the Royal Academy. I shall really and honestly enjoy it. I confess the Crystal Palace was not an exhilarating form of recreation. Seriously, Trevor, you need worry your kind brain about me no longer. Our new recruits are turning out

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such a very valuable help, taking so many matters of detail out of our hands—clubs, accounts, the bodily needs of the sick, etc., etc.—that we lead a comparative life of leisure."

"You mean the ladies?" suggested Dr. Trevor. "I come across them often in my work. Indeed, I frequently appeal to them for help, and I find them quiet and unfussy in their methods. Have you any orders for me to-day? I am just off on my rounds."

"None, thank you. Come in and smoke a pipe to-night, and I will tell you how we get on."

It was really a sympathetic and pleasing task, piloting his intelligent party of men round the Academy that afternoon. Cyril attempted no patronizing, did not tell them what to admire, nor what in his eyes was false art; he rather shared their enjoyment, noted what pleased them, and their reasons for it, and extracted much interest out of their remarks. At last most of them were tired, and then Cyril suggested that they should return home without him, as he had not yet had his fill of the pictures; so his companions bade him good-bye, and he was left to himself. It was undoubtedly a relief to be alone for a while. The gallery was no longer very crowded, and he got about easily with little or no jostling, and was free now to go and seek out the pictures of his favourite artists. He sat down on one of the sofas and studied his catalogue. Suddenly a name arrested his attention. "Portrait of Miss O'Connor, No. 174, by a celebrated R.A." How was it possible

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that Sylvia's portrait should be in the Academy and that he had not heard of it? But so it was. He rose and eagerly sought out the picture. At any rate, here it could not be wrong to study the picture and gaze as long as he liked at the lovely face. How long he stood before that portrait he never knew. The likeness was life-like. She was represented as sitting on a garden-seat out of doors, her hands crossed in her lap. She was dressed in white with a large black hat with drooping feathers, her head was slightly tilted back, and her eyes gazed out from the canvas with a strange, wistful longing in their expression that Cyril had only once noted in real life, but which had charmed him utterly. He was oblivious of the passers-by, unconscious of the criticisms that the picture evoked, forgetful of all but the beautiful face of the woman that he loved. Yes, loved! Perhaps Cyril had never more fully realized how deeply he loved than he did in standing face to face with the portrait of Sylvia O'Connor.

"Well, is it like?"

Cyril did not start. He was, in fact, too much startled for outward demonstration. Had the picture spoken? For those words were spoken in the silvery voice which belonged to Sylvia, and to Sylvia alone. They seemed to be spoken over his shoulder, yet it was an appreciable number of seconds before he turned his head, and met the light of a pair of sweet, arch eyes, looking straight into his with that peculiarly radiant, upward glance he knew all too well, whilst the smiling lips repeated the question—

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"Well, is it like?"

Was he indeed dreaming? Had the picture stepped out of its frame to confront him? There was the white dress, the black hat with its drooping plumes, the rose-tinted face, the glorious beauty which had taken his heart by storm, and transformed life for him by its wonderful alchemy. True, he had told himself that that page in his life was turned and laid aside; but with Sylvia's own self, instinct with life and loveliness, gazing up at him with that bewitching smile, how could he say that she had passed out of his life for ever? As he did not answer even her second question, but only gazed at her like a man in a dream, she clapped her little gloved hands together almost like a child, and her musical laugh rang out—

"I have done it, then! I *have* startled you! What fun! I thought you were far above all those small weaknesses that flesh is heir to! I know you are a man of nerve: but it is charming to have frightened even you!"

Her face was dimpling with arch fun. The sweet laugh which accompanied the words was perfectly free and natural. There was no acting here. It was the spontaneous expression of natural joyousness. And Cyril, realizing this, felt a strange pang go through him, the reason for which he could not pause to seek. Was this indeed the Sylvia he had rescued from death but a few short weeks ago? Was this the way she met him for the first time afterwards—and after that letter which she had written? Could

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she even laugh her light sweet laugh over his "nerve," alluding in that butterfly fashion to any experience which he had believed must make an indelible impression upon her sensitive nature? He was altogether mystified, pained, bewildered; and it was all he could do to pull himself together and speak in a natural way.

"I think I was startled. It was like seeing the picture come to life. I did not expect to meet you here, Miss O'Connor."

"No; it's a wretched Academy, isn't it? I should never trouble to come except that people drag me here to show off my own portrait. That's why I'm here to-day." She looked round with the air of a young princess, and a very scrupulously got-up gentleman, with an eye-glass in his eye and a gardenia in his button-hole, came up as if in answer to her glance.

"Colonel Harker, allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Benson."

The two men thus introduced bowed to each other a little coldly. They presented a curious contrast, the one all spirit and fire and earnestness, the other, in spite of his fine military aspect, looking a regular *habitué* of fashionable drawing-rooms or club-rooms, with all society's petty small-talk at his command, and evincing a certain lofty disdain of the young clergyman, whom he did not know either by name or sight.

And Sylvia stood between them, chattering gaily, all brightness and animation. The Colonel responded readily enough to her fire of pretty

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trivialities, but Cyril stood almost mute, only desiring to get away from this Sylvia, who was not the Sylvia of his dreams, and who only distressed and bewildered him. She threw one or two quick glances at him, and then spoke pointedly to her lord-in-waiting.

"This is my portrait that you asked me to bring you to see, Colonel Harker. May I leave you to study it for a time while I have a chat with my friend, Mr. Benson?" and she motioned Cyril to follow her to one of the sofas in the middle of the room.

"I should like you to tell me how you like my portrait. I really care for your opinion," she said, as he seated himself beside her.

"It is a perfect likeness—your living image," he answered, with a smile. "The Miss O'Connor that I made friends with in the country."

"Ah," she cried, with a little catch in her breath, "how long that seems ago! How I have wanted to see you! You ran away after that awful night" (and the beautiful face grew soft and earnest), "and gave me no chance to even say 'Thank you.'"

"But you wrote it so kindly and prettily," interposed Cyril hastily, "that it would be waste of words and breath to talk about it now."

"I often thought of you," went on Sylvia eagerly, "and wondered how you were getting on. And your hands! I sent a special message of inquiry to those hands by Edith Wingfield, but I never had an answer."

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"But the hands were not ungrateful," said Cyril, in a low voice, "only the time for inquiry was past. They were quite well."

"And the girls, Dorothy and Edith. How do they warm to their work? I have so wanted to come and see them, but I did not realize how difficult it would be to get about in London. Aunt Annie is difficult to move to the East End;" and Sylvia broke into a merry little laugh; "my maid is not considered sufficient chaperon to your outlandish parts. I proposed the excursion to Jem one Sunday afternoon, but even Jem won't always do what I want."

Mr. Benson smiled at the thought of Jem Carew's expression when asked to take his cousin to St. Chads.

"I am getting desperate, though. I shall come by hook or crook when I get the chance. At present every hour brings its engagement. Meanwhile, do you never mean to come and see us? Do you allow yourself no recreation?" and Sylvia turned towards Cyril with an air of almost entreaty in her manner.

"Why, you have found me taking my pleasure now, but my recreation must be of a sober tint to suit my work. I don't look fit company for a society belle, do I? I should have to put on a tall hat and wear a flower in my button-hole, before I could make my appearance in your aunt's drawing-room."

Cyril tried to speak gaily, but the attempt fell flat.

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"You also!" cried Sylvia impatiently. "Have you nothing better than a compliment to offer me when I ask you to come and see me?"

"It is true that I cannot well get away in the day-time, and there is no chance of meeting you in the evening except at some entertainment where I should be simply out of place. Our lives lie in such different grooves. Thank you for wishing to see me. We can always keep friends."

"But friendships flag without fanning," said Sylvia, a little wistfully. "If I cannot go often to St. Chads, and neither you nor the girls can come and see me, the result will be we shall never meet."

"No, we shall never meet," said Cyril rather drearily, "but it takes a great deal to kill a man's friendship. I don't know if a girl's is less hardy. Tell me how you are enjoying yourself? but I need hardly ask. You look the picture of enjoyment."

"I look what I am. I am so happy!" cried Sylvia, clasping her hands. "You cannot think how good and kind every one is to me. It is an intoxication of happiness, this London life. I go everywhere, see everything, have everything that any girl could wish for."

"And you never get tired?" questioned Cyril wonderingly.

"How *can* one be tired of enjoyment? Oh yes, by the way, I *am* tired of one thing, bringing people to see my portrait. I won't do it any more. I see no sense in making it a personally conducted tour, but every one always asks me to bring them."

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"It seems to me an unreasonable demand on your time and patience. I needed no personal conductor—I found it," said Cyril, betraying unconsciously by his tone that he felt as if he had found a pearl of great price.

"What were you thinking of when I startled you so?" said Sylvia, looking archly into Cyril's face.

The expression in his eyes startled her. For one instant she felt as if she had the power to read his innermost soul. The next moment it had passed like the lightning flash that makes clear every object in a landscape, and is succeeded by profound darkness.

"I believe I was lost in a reverie," he said at last, "and you roused me from my day-dream."

"I cannot stop any longer. Look how fidgety Colonel Harker is getting, and only think how cross Aunt Annie will be if I keep her horses much longer outside. She is waiting for me in the courtyard," said Sylvia, rising to her feet. Her mood had changed; she was no longer the eager, impulsive girl with whom he had made friends in the country. She was the brilliant belle who issued her commands with the air of one accustomed to be obeyed.

Cyril felt himself dismissed.

"Good-bye, then," he said, rising also, and standing hatless before her.

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever," quoted Sylvia saucily, "at least so you say. Nevertheless some day I shall bear down upon you with heavy demands for tea, and a large concert pro-

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gramme in my hand. You seem quite to have forgotten our compact."

The term "our compact" gave Cyril an unreasoning sense of joy.

"That will not be till the shorter days come, will it?" he said; "and then you may not be in town."

"Well, we can arrange it later. Meanwhile, will you give my love to the girls, or sisters shall I call them? Once more good-bye, I must be off. Colonel Harker's temper is getting really awful," and with a wave of her hand the brilliant vision was gone.

Darkness seemed to have fallen over the place, and Cyril, in rather a bewildered fashion, put his catalogue in his pocket, and prepared to go home.

"I am glad I have seen her again," he said to himself, "if only to make me realize how impossibly far she is out of my reach, but I dare not risk many such meetings."

He recounted the meeting to the girls in Filey Street that evening, delivered Miss O'Connor's message, and described her portrait with so much self-control that Dorothy thought, with a sigh of relief, that his passing fancy was clearly nipped in the bud. Sylvia was evidently nothing to him.

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CHAPTER VIII

SYLVIA IN LONDON

Park Lane, June 20.

I CANNOT possibly write a regular diary in London. There is no time to tell of all the delights of life here, but I must try and jot down some of them to tell mother when she comes home. I see I have not written a line since I was at Monckton Court. How impossible it is to believe myself the same girl that Cyril rescued from death about a month ago! Aunt Annie has been very kind. She said she did not wish my first season to be clouded by any sad remembrance, and she has done all she can to wipe out the terror of that awful night from my mind. I found myself a kind of heroine on account of that fire, and everybody has been extra kind and attentive to me because I had so narrow an escape from death. My partners talk to me about it at balls, or the man who takes me in to dinner discusses it, and I have to describe

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it over and over again, and everybody always seems to think it was by my own courage and bravery that I escaped.

At first I hated talking of it. It seemed to me a sacred subject, but latterly I have not minded so much, but I often think it hard that my rescue creates so much talk, and that scarcely any one troubles to ask even the name of my rescuer.

"A parson, you say. Awfully plucky of him, I must say, and they are not generally a plucky lot, are they? Anyhow he was a lucky fellow to save you. Wish I had had the chance. But we are losing all this waltz. Will you come for another turn?"

That was the comment my story evoked last night. I cannot always go into heroics about Mr. Benson, but it makes me so cross. I am having a perfectly delightful time, and I am enjoying every hour of life, only I wish the days were twice as long. I think people talk hard things of the world. I find it such a happy place, and every one is so good to me.

I am growing really fond of Jem. In London he becomes an absolute necessity to me. In the country you can go where you like at your own sweet will, but here I find I may not stir without chaperon, man, or maid. Aunt Annie is an excellent chaperon, but there are limits to her capacities. She gets *so soon* tired, and a maid tacked on to my heels is more than I can often stand. It is no better than being in the nursery, so it throws me back on Jem, dear good-natured

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Jem, plain I admit, unfortunately plain, but such a thorough gentleman, much more so than half the men I meet in society. I find Jem so safe and comfortable, and I work him, I am afraid, very hard. We ride in the Row together (he likes that), or I carry him off to Bond Street when I go shopping, and leave him kicking his heels in the street whilst I do my commissions. He never will admit that this bores him horribly, but I know it does, although he is too kind to grumble. I don't like to confess even to myself that I am a little "hard up," as Jem would call it. Father makes me a magnificent allowance, and of course I shall have lots of money of my own when I am twenty-one, but money melts away in London. I lost a good many clothes in the fire at Monckton Court, which I had to replace when I came up to town, but allowing for this I ought not to have spent nearly all I had by me, and I don't know where it is gone. I am rather uneasy in my conscience, because I had dedicated a certain sum to St. Chads as a thank-offering for my deliverance at Monckton Court, and I never sent it, and now I have not got it to send. Father told me never to either run into debt or borrow from any one, and I am ashamed to ask for more money until my next quarter is due, but when I get it the next post shall carry my cheque to Mr. Benson. I meant to do so many things and have not done them. I find no time. Even Sunday brings no leisure. Aunt Annie goes to church always in the morning, and I go with her, and Jem too sometimes, and in the afternoon

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we have a walk in the Park, Jem and I, and meet lots of friends, and at tea there are more friends who stay on and chatter about anything or nothing, and in the evening there is dinner. I never get to church twice. I started the notion once of abandoning dinner and taking my maid with me to evening service, but I was coughed down by Aunt Annie, and dare not propose it again. The next Sunday I asked Jem to take me to St. Chads. He was dumb with astonishment.

"You—want—to—drag—me down to that beastly hole, Sylvia?" he said. "It can't be done at any price."

"But Dorothy Benson and Edith Wingfield are there. I have never been to call on them. I have never seen Mr. Benson to even shake hands with him, or thank him since the fire. What can they all think me but a heartless humbug? I have a very great mind to take a cab and go there by myself and spend the day," I said, goaded into defiance by Jem's air of authority.

For all answer Jem took my hands and turned me round to a full-length mirror near me.

"May I ask if you think you look the sort of young person to go off in a cab by herself and spend the day at the East End?" said Jem. "You will have to be older and uglier before you can carry out such mad schemes."

I sighed and gave in. What else could I do?

This afternoon I met Mr. Benson quite unexpectedly at the Academy. Colonel Harker, whom I have seen much of since I was in London, kept

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pestering me to take him to see my portrait. In vain I told him the number of the picture and the artist, but nothing would satisfy him but that I should take him myself.

"He did so want to compare it with the original," he said; and so, out of sheer good-nature, I took him this afternoon, and Aunt Annie told me to put on a white gown and black hat, so that it might look as much like my picture as possible.

"It is the last time I will do it," I said, "the very last time. Every partner at a ball thinks he may ask me to bring him to see my own portrait. It seems so absurd. They can go well enough without me."

However, I took Colonel Harker, and there, standing before the picture lost in reverie, deaf to all sounds apparently, stood Mr. Benson.

I don't know what spirit of mischief possessed me, but I stepped up quietly behind him and asked him if he thought it a good likeness, and if I had been a thunderbolt dropped from the skies, he could not have seemed more startled nor less pleased. He was almost as stiff and cold as an icicle. He has the same extraordinarily interesting face, the same faculty for plunging one straight beneath the surface into the heart of things. I saw that Colonel Harker and he would not amalgamate. I was sorry Colonel Harker was with me, so I shelved him for a while, and talked to Mr. Benson on one of the centre seats. I told him how I had longed to go to St. Chads and could not manage it yet, and he

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expressed no regret; and then I asked him to bring Dorothy and Edith to see me, and he declined, scarcely with thanks. Yet once he spoke of our being "friends" as an established, unalterable fact; and when I referred to the reverie out of which I had so rudely awakened him, he looked for one instant as he did on the night of the fire, almost as if he were ready to die for one; but the look vanished quicker than I can chronicle it, and he passed over my remark quite lightly. Anyway, he has made me feel he does not want to meet me any more. It seems a little odd. Men flock to Aunt Annie's house usually without any invitation —all sorts and conditions of men, officers, barristers, men about town who do nothing but flirt, I know any amount of them—and this man quietly and steadily refuses to come, although he is a friend and the others are all acquaintances; and I put a good deal of pressure on. However, it settles my line of conduct. I shall not ask him again. Colonel Harker was inclined to crack jokes at the expense of my "ritualistic parson," as he called Mr. Benson, but I fairly snubbed him into silence by telling him that he was the hero of the Monckton Court fire, and that I naturally felt indebted to him.

"Pretty brave for one of the third sex, was it not?" I added. "He might almost have been an officer."

I owed Colonel Harker a grudge for that remark the other night, or I should not have been so disagreeable, but it takes a good deal to pierce his armour of self-conceit.

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July 7.—I have had such a fascinating day, one of many. I wish I had space to describe half the things I have been to. I always think the last is the pleasantest. To-day we have been down to the Henley Regatta. Jem promised me a really good day, and I have had it. We were quite a nice party. Lady Isabella and Julia Watson, two rather pretty but slangy girls whom Aunt Annie promised to look after for the day; Colonel Harker, who bores me a good deal; Mr. Davis, a chum of Jem's, a very merry, good-hearted young fellow whom I like very much; and one or two other University men; these, with Aunt Annie, Jem, and myself, composed the party. It was fun from beginning to end. We travelled some part of the way by train, and the horses, which had been sent on over-night, met us with a brake at some station not far from Henley. We had rather a rowdy journey, I must confess. We sang, we played games, we chattered and laughed; and I sheltered myself behind Mr. Davis from Colonel Harker's rather overpowering attentions, which had the double advantage of amusing Mr. Davis and annoying Colonel Harker. Aunt Annie bore with our noise and laughter as long as we were in the train, but begged for rather more respectable behaviour when we joined the carriage. I, for one, was quite content to be quieter and watch the very amusing scene about me.

Carriages of every description crowded the road, from the fashionable four-in-hand with its freight of smartly-dressed people, to the coster's cart with

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its merry load of men and women all bent alike on enjoyment.

Children shouted after us as we passed, throwing wild-flowers in the wake of our carriage and earning thereby coppers from some of our unwise but kindly-hearted guests. Thereupon ensued such a scramble in the dust, that one was thankful if they issued from the fray safe in life and limb. As we drew near the river the scene became even more animated. Nigger troupes serenaded us as we passed; University men flocked everywhere in straw hats and blazers of every colour of the rainbow, all of them bright, kindly, and good-tempered. Taken as a whole, I like University men. They take so much trouble to please one, and they are much more simple and enthusiastic than men about town. My chosen cavalier for the day was Mr. Davis. The carriage was drawn up in an open space by the river, where we could obtain a good view of the races. The horses were taken out, and then came the serious business of the day—luncheon. One goes to Henley Regatta for everything but the races; they are the least important feature of the day. The river looked lovely covered with boats, and on either side the house-boats were decked gaily with flags and flowers. When the bell rang it meant the clearing of the course for a race, and woe to the luckless wight who did not hasten to obey the sound. Then, after a few seconds, two boats would pass, the crew of each pulling with desperate earnestness; and then there was the shout of

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triumph for the winner, and one asked who it was and forgot the next minute. Lots of people dropped in to luncheon at our brake, many were the invitations we received to tea, chocolate, and ices from friends who had house-boats on the river. I accepted at least eight on my own account.

"We can't go about like a girls' school," I said, when luncheon was despatched. "May I go off with Mr. Davis and Jem, Aunt Annie? and we will come back at any time you like to name."

Having won a gracious assent, we started off. We were assailed at once by gipsies eager to tell our fortunes, for a consideration! Jem called it "stuff and nonsense;" but Mr. Davis pleaded so hard that he might pay for my fortune to be told, that I gave in, and a bold, black-eyed gipsy studied my hand, and looked into my face, and prophesied smooth things for me; wealth and long life, and many lovers, and one lucky one favoured with a face uncommonly like Mr. Davis's from the description, and the hapless youth by my side looked down and blushed, and Jem looked rather glum.

"I suppose she liked your looks better than Jem's, Mr. Davis," I said, as we passed on our way, "for she clearly was describing you. Don't feel nervous. Gipsy prophecies never come true."

The poor boy was so shy that he stammered out something incoherent, and we laughed together, and forgot our gipsy and her fortune-telling.

We worked steadily at our eight invitations; we

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risked our digestions for a month over tempting confectionaries; we laughed and talked till my throat ached.

"Jem," I whispered, after our sixth visit, "I am tired of talking, more tired of eating. Take me on to the river in a boat. I want to see all the people. I want so badly to get inside the Isthmian enclosure and hear that lovely Hungarian Band. Mr. Davis has a ticket that will admit us."

A few minutes later we were struggling among the mass of boats on the river. It required all the skill of my two cavaliers to avoid either running into other people or being run into ourselves, oars got hopelessly caught, little cries of terror broke from girls unused to boating, smiling apologies were exchanged. Finally we drew up at the Isthmian enclosure and got out and listened in rapt delight to that most fascinating Hungarian Band. Groups of gaily-dressed people sat and listened, others walked about and talked in voices loud enough to be heard above the music. All was life and movement and brightness. One felt glad for a time to be protected from the rougher life outside. Only ticket-holders could obtain entrance here.

"Sylvia, I am afraid we must be going," said Jem at last. "It is getting late, and my mother will be expecting us."

I rose with a sigh.

"All right, Jem, I am ready; but it has been lovely, has it not? A perfect day all through."

July 5.—There is a horrid waste of flowers in

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London. Last night, for example, I had three bouquets sent me for Lady Fergusson's ball. Now it is obvious that no girl can wear three bouquets at one time. One came from the faithful Jem, another from Colonel Harker, and the third from my new knight, Mr. Davis. I often accept Jem's bouquets, so I would not take his last night for fear of making him conceited. I rejected Colonel Harker's with loathing. He has never sent me flowers before, and he won't do it again, I fancy, so the lot fell on Mr. Davis's bouquet, and I made a mistake. That ball was rather an eventful one. Colonel Harker came forward with the air of an assured favourite which annoyed me, and made me feel unamiable at once.

"You did not favour me with your company much yesterday, Miss O'Connor. I hope you will give me some dances to-night?" he said, smiling down at me.

"I am full up," I answered, glancing at my card, "except this next Lancers. You can have that, if you like." I spoke with studied indifference.

"Surely you will give me the supper dance?" he said, in a tone of considerable annoyance.

"I am sorry, but I am already engaged for it. You need not have this Lancers unless you like."

"I am not likely to refuse your only vacancy," he said, a little sulkily, and he offered me his arm, and we took our places for the dance.

"So you have not honoured me so far as to wear my flowers," he said, as I laid down my bouquet. "I suppose your cousin keeps you supplied?"

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The remark had a questioning tone about it, which I naturally resented.

"I have many flowers sent me, and I wear those that I choose to wear," I said deliberately.

"And you have not chosen mine," my companion persisted.

I was getting angry.

"No," I said at last. "I thank you for them, but I would rather you did not send me any more."

"Am I to accept this as your final order?" he said, turning rather grey.

"My final order, please," I repeated.

After that we talked on indifferent topics, and separated with mutual relief at the end of our dance. I do not think Colonel Harker will trouble me again.

The other incident of the evening made me very sorry, and has given me the feeling that quite unintentionally I have behaved badly.

I determined to make Mr. Davis enjoy himself as far as I could, and as he was one of our party, I danced with him a good deal. I have seen something of him ever since I came up to London, but our acquaintance had never ripened into anything like intimacy until yesterday. I have always looked upon him as simply a boy. He is still at the University, and although he is years older than I am, I have felt him practically to be a great deal younger. I was horribly taken aback therefore, when, towards the end of the evening, when we were sitting out after one of the dances, he

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proposed to me. It made me very unhappy. He pleaded his cause with such passionate earnestness. He had loved me, he said, from the first moment he set eyes on me. He was absolutely incoherent in his earnestness.

"You were so good to me yesterday," he said, "and you wore my flowers to-night, and I thought I had perhaps a shadow of a chance. At any rate, I could hold my tongue no longer."

I tried so hard to silence him, not to let him speak out all that was seething in his kind, tender heart, but he would persist in asking me to give him a chance, to let him wait.

"I would wait patiently for you for years," he said pathetically. "I shall never care for anybody else."

Poor boy. I was dreadfully sorry for him. I told him it was no use to give him false hope, that I should never care for him like that, that I wanted to keep free.

"I meant no harm by my behaviour yesterday," I said. "We were all merry together, and I never thought you cared for me like this, and I wore your flowers because you were good and kind to that poor girl, but I fear I have made a mistake."

"No," he said, "I am glad I have spoken to you. I shall care for you always, always, but I cannot see you again yet. To-morrow I shall leave London. The mistake has been mine, not yours."

So to-day my poor little knight has departed,

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having written me a broken-hearted note of farewell, but it has given me much to think of. They say girls love to feel their power over men. I can honestly say that to have the power of inflicting pain is a curse rather than a blessing. I have wished lately that I had remained at school till I could have seen the world under my mother's wing. I do not know what to do, nor how to act. I want some kind, good woman to talk to. If I tell Aunt Annie she will only regard it as rather a triumph on my part. She is pleased and proud that I am what she is pleased to call "a success." I think I will go some day and talk to Lady Wylmington. Although she is so good, I know she will not be hard upon me. It really takes the joy out of life if I may not be merry or agreeable to a man without his proposing to me.

July 7.—"Sylvia, would you like to go to the Bishop of London's garden-party next Saturday? Canon Hill of St. Paul's has offered to take us if we care to go," said Aunt Annie at breakfast this morning.

"Is it amusing?" I inquired doubtfully.

"You would not find it so, Sylvia," said Jem. "Clerics, nothing but clerics; bishops, deans, rectors, curates, popular preachers with their wives and daughters in advancing stages of dowdiness. Occasionally you catch an Indian prince and his suite, who may be anxious to see what our clergy look like in their every-day dress, but it is a distinctly dull form of entertainment. Don't go, Sylvia. You will be bored to death."

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"London is doing a great deal for you, Jem," I said approvingly. "You have described that party so well that you have inspired me with a wish to go. You cannot form a fair judgment of any set of men unless you see them in frocks. I will tell you how I like clergy *en masse* when I come back."

"Fulham Palace is quite a beautiful place to see, at any rate," said Aunt Annie. "I shall tell Canon Hill that we shall be pleased to go."

So it is settled that we go, and I rather look forward to it. I wonder if Mr. Benson will be there?

July 10.—I enjoyed yesterday immensely, more than I have enjoyed anything for weeks. The gardens at Fulham Palace are simply beautiful, a marvel of peace and quietness, with wide lawns and far-spreading cedar-trees and groups of flower-beds bright with geraniums and every kind of bedding-out plant.

Then the company was distinctly interesting. Canon Hill was very kind, and pointed out to us all the Church celebrities, and there were many, for the day was fine; but what interested me far more were the faces of many of the overworked clergy. They were enjoying themselves genuinely. Few people looked bored. There were not many smart people, but girls, dressed simply and quietly, were sauntering about listening to the band, and scattered groups gathered round the refreshment buffets in the garden. I felt that people were enjoying themselves in their own fashion. It was

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a new view of society. I did not at first think there was a soul there that I had ever met before.

"Aunt Annie," I said, "I find this amusing. Let us sit in these two chairs and watch the arrivals. How tired the Bishop and 'Bishopess' must get of shaking hands. They have been standing here for the last hour doing nothing else, and more and more keep flocking in."

"It is delightfully cool here," said Aunt Annie, sinking into the chair I put for her; "but I am afraid we have nothing more to see to-day. Canon Hill has pointed out the Church celebrities, and evidently Royalty does not intend to put in an appearance to-day, either black or white. I hoped that at least we might have come across an Indian prince."

"Will Mr. Benson do to amuse you?" I said; "for here he comes, convoying a party of ladies."

I could not keep a certain joyousness out of my voice. I was so glad, so unaccountably glad, to see him again.

"*You* are pleased enough anyway, Sylvia," said Auntie, turning her pince-nez full upon me. "Your tone sounds quite joyful, and, good gracious, child! how hot you look."

"I am hot—broiling, I think," I cried, impatient of her survey; "and of course I am very glad to see Mr. Benson again. The Bishop is having quite a long talk with him. Oh, Aunt Annie! *Who* do you think he has got with him? Dear Edith, looking so *sweet* in a pale grey frock and grey bonnet all to match. Oh, how glad I am! The

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three others are strangers. Mayn't I go and meet them?"

"Wait till they get a little nearer, dear. Now I should not wonder at all if Mr. Benson and Edith Wingfield make a match of it, and it would be very suitable too," continued Aunt Annie. "Why, how happy and pretty she looks."

I rose from my chair with a slight feeling of irritability. "I *must* go to them, Aunt Annie. I can't wait a moment longer;" and, without waiting for further sanction, I ran forward to welcome them.

"Edith, I am *so* glad, oh, so glad to see you again!" I said; "and it never struck me I should see you here."

I held her by both hands and kissed her. I could not help it. Her lady friends drew back smiling, wondering, I dare say, who the effusive stranger might be.

"How perfectly charming to see you again," said Edith warmly. "Mrs. Watson, may I introduce my friend, Miss O'Connor? These are the Miss Watsons."

I bowed to the trio, then turned to Mr. Benson.

"It is a delightful surprise to meet you," I said, as I shook hands.

"The surprise is ours rather," said Mr. Benson, taking his place by my side. "We did not hope to meet you at a party wholly dedicated to clerics. I am greatly afraid you will be bored."

"I don't know the meaning of the word, or only dimly feel it at rare intervals; certainly not to-day," I answered merrily. "I frankly own I am

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an impostor. I have no clergyman belonging to me now, and do not think I even own one amongst my ancestors. Neither are we invited here on our own merits. We were smuggled in, Aunt Annie and I, by Canon Hill, whose own female belongings are away just now."

"Where is Mrs. Carew?" said Edith, who still kept my hand. "I must go and speak to her. I see the Watsons have kindly left me with you for the present. Mrs. Watson is chaperoning me to-day; she is the wife of a City clergyman."

"Why is not Dorothy here?" I asked.

"She did not want to come," said Edith. "She has club accounts on the brain, and was reckoning wildly on my absence. Now I wanted to come dreadfully and have a look at my fellows again and see a pretty garden. It seems such a gay world, but the greatest joy of all is seeing you."

The words were so evidently sincere, they touched me. I brought my two companions to Aunt Annie.

"Well, my dear," she said, with an approving glance at Edith, "so far your work has not hurt you. You are thinner and paler, but you look remarkably well."

"I *am* well; and very happy, thank you," Edith answered, laughing and blushing.

"Mr. Benson, come and talk to me. I want to hear all about your parish," continued Aunt Annie, motioning him to a vacant chair by her side; and Mr. Benson courteously obeyed, although I think he looked a little wistfully after Edith and me, as we went off together for a stroll.

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"Talk whilst you can," I said eagerly. "Tell me everything. Do you like it? Are you happy?"

"Very, *now*," Edith answered frankly. "For the first few weeks I was horribly home-sick, but I soon grew so interested in all I had to do that I forgot about it."

"What *have* you to do?" I persisted. "Do you go to church three times a day?"

Edith stood still and laughed. "Why, we did not go there to go to church. We could do that at home. We go just as we like, and when we like, to church. We go generally to the seven o'clock service every morning. I work chiefly among the sick. I am fond of nursing, and Lady Wylmington put me in the way of learning something about it before I came, so Dr. Trevor keeps me very busy looking after the non-infectious cases of illness that are not bad enough to send to a hospital. I cook for them, bandage their legs or arms—in fact make myself generally useful."

"And you like doing this?" I asked wonderingly.

"I love it," cried Edith enthusiastically.

"What does Dorothy do?"

"The parish accounts, school, clubs, choir accounts, and so on. She takes the superintendence of the needlework, too, at the schools. She has a very strong influence amongst the girls. She has more irons in the fire than I have. There is enough work in St. Chads for a whole army of Sisters, so you can imagine sometimes one feels rather hopeless."

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"I know what you will all do," I cried despairingly. "You will all over-work yourselves and die. All good people die young. Now *I* shall live to be a hundred years old."

"Thank you," said Edith gaily, "for your kind prophecy. I will tell you who does over-work, and that is Mr. Benson. Oh, Sylvia, he is an angel. I have never known any one half so good and self-denying" (and Edith's voice dropped almost to a whisper). "He works by night and day too. If anybody sends for a clergyman in the middle of the night to visit a dying person, or baptize a child, it is always Mr. Benson that goes, and he is sometimes out till ten and eleven in the evening trying to make friends with the boys and men, and they do love him. I hear a great deal of him, and of Dr. Trevor too, when I go on my rounds."

"And you like Dr. Trevor?" I asked.

"Yes," said Edith, with a slight air of constraint. "He takes a long time to know, but he is delightful to work under. He reposes such perfect confidence in one."

"I hope you don't call him an angel too. It would be too overpowering."

"No," replied Edith, with a little burst of laughter; "'angel' does not describe Dr. Trevor. He is a very good, strong, kind man, with a determined will and rather a hot temper."

Mr. Benson came towards us with hurrying steps.

"Your aunt has sent me for you, Miss O'Connor,"

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he said. "She remembers suddenly that she promised to look in at a bazaar, and she says there is only just time to go there before it closes. I confess I call it cheating your friends. I was looking forward to an afternoon of real enjoyment."

"I will not go," I said impatiently. "It is the first I have ever heard of this bazaar, and I am enjoying myself. When shall I get the chance of seeing you both again? I have not been here an hour."

Notwithstanding my protest, I reluctantly followed Mr. Benson to where Aunt Annie was sitting. She was all blandness and smiles.

"Why, here is my naughty truant!" she said, playfully patting my arm. "I am afraid it is a disappointment to you to hurry away like this, but you see I cannot leave you alone here, and a promise is a promise, you know."

"Oh, Aunt Annie, I don't *want* to go," I said, feeling like a baffled child, almost ready to cry; "I have scarcely spoken to Mr. Benson or Edith, and I have so much to talk to them about. Can't I be left, and follow home in a cab?"

Suddenly help came from a wholly unexpected quarter. Canon Hill stood by, smiling at my distress.

"Is it a chaperon you need, Miss O'Connor?" he asked mildly. "Leave her with me, Mrs. Carew. I shall not be leaving for an hour or two, and I will bring her round to your house in my carriage."

"How kind you are!" I cried, clapping my

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hands. "Then I shall stay, Aunt Annie. I shall be home by dinner-time;" and I gaily nodded at her and prepared to rejoin Edith, but I caught my breath as I saw Aunt Annie's face. She looked very angry.

"You must please yourself, Sylvia, but I am sorry not to take you with me;" and she sailed off in displeased dignity.

"Oh, but this is too delightful," I said, watching her retreating figure. "But she is angry, Mr. Benson, awfully angry, and she generally lets me do anything I like, in reason. I have not asked anything very unreasonable, have I?"

"Nothing unreasonable at all that I can see," he said, amusement dancing in his eyes. "Now I will fetch Miss Wingfield, and show you two the library and the chapel. We had better wait for tea until this crush is somewhat over."

"I will come too," I said, and we crossed the lawn together.

"How do you find life? Still all sunshine with never a cloud?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"As the spirit 'moves me,'" I answered lightly. "Some days are all enchantment, and sometimes I have needless fits of depression. I shall not be sorry to leave London now. I believe I have had my fill of gaiety. We shall wait till Goodwood is over for Jem's sake, and then we shall all go our different ways. I am going off to Yorkshire and Ireland to relations and friends. We shall be in London for a little time in October, and then we will settle our concert."

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"Here you are, Edith," I continued, touching her on the arm. "My aunt has left me, and I am free to be with you as long as I like."

What an afternoon we had wandering round that lovely old garden, sometimes sitting listening to the band, chattering all the time with the light-hearted ease of the days at Monckton. I found myself recounting my experiences, describing my balls, and Ascot, and the Henley Regatta, and Edith listened with wide-open eyes.

At last I saw Canon Hill approaching; I knew my afternoon was over. Mr. Benson and I stood a little apart.

"You have had a whole afternoon's recreation! You will feel quite dissipated," I said, turning half-mockingly towards him.

"Yes," he answered, quite gravely. "I have given myself over to enjoyment, and to-morrow I shall live on the remembrance of to-day." He looked as if the words had escaped from him unwittingly.

A minute later and I had said good-bye to my two friends, and was borne off by my kindly friend.

Aunt Annie had recovered her equanimity when I went home, and made no reference to my open rebellion.

"Well, Sylvia, did you find the clerics to your taste?" Jem said that night at dinner.

"So much so that I feel I have lost my vocation. I ought to have been a man and a clergyman.

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Canon Hill is delightful. He was so kind to me. By the way, Jem, I met Miss Wingfield and Mr. Benson. I had quite a delightful afternoon."

"Umph!" said Jem; and with that somewhat colourless interjection the discussion of the Bishop's party ended.

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CHAPTER IX

LADY WYLMINGTON'S NARRATIVE

MY sojourn in London this season has been one perpetual study of contrasts. I have kept no regular record of them from day to day, but certain scenes and impressions stand out as vividly in my mind as though they had happened yesterday. Now that I have leisure at my command, I will write down a few of these in my book that is dedicated to the record of Cyril's life—for I cannot but connect with him many of these impressions which on the face of things scarcely seem to belong to this narrative. For I cannot dissociate from this record the sayings and doings of Sylvia O'Connor. There seems to be some link between those two which is proving stronger than circumstance or temperament. What is it? and will it prove a blessing or the converse? I look on sometimes with a sense of misgiving and dread; yet who

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knows but God's purpose may be working out all the while even in this ?

The first absorbing interest when we reached London was the migration of Edith and Dorothy to St. Chads and their work there. I had promised Mr. and Mrs. Wingfield to see them through that, and it was needful to go backwards and forwards a good many times whilst the rooms were being prepared and the place made ready for their reception. Then Edith, who has what I think I may call a genius for nursing, was keenly anxious to gain a little insight into skilled nursing before starting on her new career ; and I obtained permission from my friend Miss Webster for her to go for four hours daily to the women and children's hospital in Albert Street, to work there under the trained nurses, and learn as much as it was possible to do in so short a space. I was glad for the girl to be thus occupied, as it kept up her courage and enthusiasm, and quite helped her over that momentary recoil from and almost horror of the awful grimness of London life down in the East which naturally assailed her at first. I think Edith will find herself in her right place at St. Chads. She will have ample scope for all her energies without going out of her sphere, as she was sometimes tempted to do in her father's parish. She is a very good girl, true to the core, tender and warm-hearted and full of quick insight and sympathy with the poor. She will be happy in her work, I am sure, and I think she will do it well.

I went with them to see them settled in, when

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at last all was ready. As I looked round the rooms, which had been made clean and bright, and were now furnished very simply, but comfortably and appropriately, and thought of the pleasant homes of ease and luxury which both of these girls were voluntarily leaving, I could not but think, with a sense of wonder and almost of awe, upon the marvellous power of Christian love and faith. How much are not men and women in these days willing and eager to give up, so that they may bring the good tidings of great joy to their brethren who are sunk in misery and blindness for want of a knowledge of that light!

East London looked terribly grey and grim that day. Summer though it was, a pall of smoke and cloud hung low over it, taking all the little light and colour that ever is there quite away. And the narrow, dirty streets looked more squalid, I thought, than ever I had seen them, the people more slatternly and unkempt, the innumerable public-houses more disorderly and crowded. I saw three street-fights before I got clear of the immediate neighbourhood of St. Chads, and the heavy air seemed to reek of refuse and all kinds of unsavoury abominations.

And this was the place where Cyril, Dorothy, and Edith had elected to live and fight out their share of life's mysterious battle!

I went home disinclined for any further exertion that day, but found upon my table a little scented note. I knew the handwriting. It was from my god-daughter, Beatrice Congleton, who was going

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through the excitement and anxiety of playing hostess in her own house to the fashionable world. Since her marriage she has been much abroad, and this is her first season in her town-house.

"You will come to-night, dearest godmother, will you not?" she wrote. "I know you do not go to balls now; but you will come to me and see me through my first, won't you? I shall feel dreadfully shy still till everything is in full swing. Do come and help me through with it. I am counting upon you."

Beatrice has always looked to me ever since she lost her mother, and I felt I could not ignore this appeal. I had not thought of going simply in answer to the gilded card received a week ago, but this note was different. I dined and drove there early, and was received with a little shriek of welcome.

"How good of you! I am so delighted to have you. There are a hundred things I want to ask. I do so want everything to go well. And I want you to see my pretty *débutante* too. You have heard of her, of course?—Miss O'Connor—everybody is talking about her. It is her first season, and she is an heiress, and the loveliest creature you ever saw. She is coming to-night. I am so glad. There is no trouble in getting dancing men when Miss O'Connor is known to be expected."

"I know Sylvia O'Connor," I answered. "Mrs. Carew is a neighbour of mine in Somersetshire. Her niece was there a short time since. She is very beautiful and charming."

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"Simply bewitching, I call her. And women admire her almost as much as men, which I suppose is the highest praise you can give a girl;" and then Beatrice launched out into a hundred little trifling inquiries upon details important to a hostess, and I sat and answered her, looking round at the gilded walls, the softened glow of electric light, the banks of flowers, the costly draperies—and thought of what I had seen earlier in the day.

Invited guests now began to arrive thick and fast, and Beatrice stood at the top of her grand staircase, whilst I looked on from my distant sofa. In the dancing-room the musicians were beginning softly to tune their instruments; the ripple of laughter and soft voices mingled with the snatches of sound from violin and piano. There was an endless rustle of silken draperies, brilliance and light and perfume were all about me as I sat. Girls in gauzy draperies and matrons in silks and velvet and flashing jewels filled the room with a sea of dazzling rainbow tints. And before my mind's eye there rose up a vision of two slim girlish figures in plain black dresses and long cloaks, standing with grave, resolute faces in a small, plain room in the heart of a labyrinth of squalid streets; and it seemed as though one or other of these mental pictures must be a dream, so sharply did the sense of contrast come upon me that night.

"Lady Wylmington! Ah, how delightful to meet you at last! I thought I was never going to see you any more!"

I looked up, and there was Sylvia standing

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before me in all the radiant loveliness of perfect health and happiness, her eyes shining like stars, her face all aglow with genuine pleasure, her hands stretched out in the prettiest, warmest gesture of welcome. I rose to my feet and gave her a kiss. I could not help it, and she was as pleased as a child.

"Oh, thank you; that makes me feel like old times. Everything is quite lovely in London, but it is—don't you know what I mean?—just a little bit stiff and formal. People don't seem to have time to be fond of one another. Now *may* I sit down and have a nice little chat with you before the dancing begins? I have a hundred things I want to say, and Aunt Annie, you see, has found a friend there. I have been hoping every day to meet you, and yet I never have. You do go into society still, do you not? *You* are not one of those who think it almost wrong?"

There was a touch of incipient anxiety in the tone, so like Sylvia that I could not but smile.

"I do not go out very much now, because I am growing old, not because I think it wrong. On the contrary, I think it is a mistake to withdraw ourselves from the sphere to which God has called us without a very sufficient reason. We may be quite sure that He has work for us to do everywhere, and wants us as much in one place as another, unless He Himself calls us out from it. Have we not talked of this before? But I have been more busy than usual these last weeks getting Edith Wingfield and Dorothy Benson settled into

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their new home in East London. You heard all about the plan, I know. They have been full of nothing else, and did not want to go out; so I have been very little about myself as yet."

A number of different expressions flitted over Sylvia's face whilst I was speaking. She was sitting just at right angles to me on the corner couch, and I could see every line of her graceful figure and mark every flitting emotion that passed over her bright face. She was dressed in white, like most young *débutantes*, and her dress was of the softest white silk, covered over with a film of delicate lace. It was cut low, after the fashion of ball-dresses, and her arms were bare almost from the shoulder. Her bright hair was piled up most artistically and becomingly, and adorned with starry white blossoms and delicate fronds of fern. Her only ornament was a great spray of similar white blossoms fastened on the shoulder and trailing across the front of her dress. Nothing could be more perfectly simple than her costume, and yet it conveyed an impression of grace and elegance and costliness that a princess might envy. Her sparkling eyes and the fluctuating colour in her face gave light and warmth to a vision that might else have been lacking in colour. It was no wonder I thought that she was the cynosure of all eyes, and that already there was a ring of eager admirers gathering round her at a short distance, of which fact, however, she appeared to be perfectly unconscious.

"Ah!" she said, after a brief pause, "I re-

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member. I met Mr. Benson the other day in the Royal Academy."

A sudden burning blush dyed her cheek as she said this. I was a little surprised, for Sylvia was seldom self-conscious.

"Did he tell you?" she asked suddenly.

"No; I have not seen him very lately."

"And besides, there would be nothing to tell," she said hastily, turning to me with one of her most vivid smiles, and seeming—how can I express it?—suddenly to put something (was it her truer self?) behind her, crushing it down out of sight and memory. "We are always shifting and mixing up together like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, aren't we? And nothing is ever the same twice over. But oh, Lady Wylmington, everything is charming and delightful! I was never so happy in all my life before. I can't tell you what it is like! All that I love and delight in seems to come to me as a matter of course. Everything is sunshine and light and beauty. But you know it all, of course. You were once a girl, and everybody must have worshipped you. Did you have a great triumph when you came out? I am sure you must have done?"

"I came out so long ago, my dear, that I do not remember a great deal about it, nor did things move quite so fast in those days as they do now."

"Ah, that is just the best of it, it goes so fast!" cried Sylvia, with sparkling eyes. "Time seems just to fly; there are so many, many charming things to put into each day. Sometimes it is

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like living in fairy-land. I never guessed what it was like. Oh, are they beginning already? I suppose I must go. I do hope I shall find you again before the evening is over. There were such a lot of things I wanted to talk about. But one never has time for anything now. See my programme! It is full already; but perhaps I shall find a moment in spite of it all."

"Or you can come and see me at home some day when you have a spare moment," I answered. "We are quite near neighbours, you know, and in the mornings at least I am almost always in. Perhaps you could spend a Sunday with me some day."

"Oh, I should like that!" she exclaimed eagerly, as she rose and laid her hand upon the arm of the partner who came to claim her; "I will ask Aunt Annie. Of course I cannot make engagements without her leave. I never know what she has planned."

And she was borne away from me and lost in the shifting throng.

Presently Mrs. Carew came up all smiles and blandness, and we moved together to a divan in the dancing-room, she to keep an eye on her young charge, and I to watch the girl as she floated along with her own matchless, inimitable grace, first with one partner, then with another, as tireless as though there were wings to her feet, as happy in the atmosphere of adulation and admiration she was receiving as a bird or a butterfly in the sunshine.

Sylvia did not consciously flirt, I will always

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maintain that, although there were not lacking those who accused her of that most unwomanly vice. If her radiant smile and quick responsiveness led those about her to believe she took an especial interest in each of them individually, it was not her intention to produce this impression. It was her very nature to throw herself with the zest of a child into the amusement of the moment, and to delight herself with whatever companion chanced to be beside her. At the moment her interest and sympathy and liking were perfectly sincere; and if the impression made were only transitory, was it altogether her fault if those about her misjudged her and were deceived? A little more insight and observation on their part should have taught them a lesson. But an inexperienced girl, in the glamour of her first season and an almost unmixed triumph, was it to be expected that she would examine and analyze very closely? She was happy, and she asked for nothing more.

Mrs. Carew murmured many little confidences into my ear as we sat and watched Sylvia dancing through that evening, as though she would dance through her whole life without a thought or a care. Already the girl had received and refused several "good" offers from a worldly standpoint, although, as the names of the aspirants were whispered in my ear, I could not but be thankful that Sylvia's instinct had saved her from such alliances. Mrs. Carew was visibly elated both by the offers and their rejection.

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"Of course the dear girl knows better than to be deceived by a mere title, or the temptation of wealth without anything better," she said; and I soon realized that Mrs. Carew had set her heart on marrying Sylvia to her own son—a very excellent young man, if not a very interesting one—and that she was delighted with Sylvia for keeping herself still free. Apart from the fact of their being cousins—and even the cousinship was not quite as near as it sounded, Mrs. Carew and Mrs. O'Connor being only half-sisters, I believe—the marriage might be a fairly good one for both, and the devotion of the young man was evident. But it was somehow difficult to imagine the brilliant and winning Sylvia, full of fire, imagination, and enthusiasm, settling down to a life shared with a man like Jem Carew, when she had all London society at her feet in the hour of her triumph.

Again and again she joined us for just a few moments between the dances, and her face was always wreathed in smiles.

"It *is* so delightful!" she kept saying, as she sat fanning herself between us; and then she would tell us in the most charmingly confidential fashion what this person and the other had said to her, laughing at some of the fine compliments as gaily as a child, but always with perfect friendliness and kindliness, poking a bit of arch fun at one, mimicking another in her own inimitably graceful fashion, always so sure of sympathy and liking that it was impossible not to give it

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her, and the burden of her song being always the same—"It is all so delightful, and I am so happy!"

Was this the same Sylvia who had knelt beside me in Monckton Church to give thanks for a great deliverance? It was not easy always to connect this Sylvia with the other, and yet I knew it needed only a few words to bring back the look upon that lovely face which it had worn that day. When she first sat down beside me there had been an eager look in her eyes which I knew meant a desire to renew our old sympathetic relations. She wanted to ask questions, I knew, about that other life which now looked so far away. But some sudden jarring note had been struck, and she turned away from the thought, and sought forgetfulness in the present. I could almost guess what the struggle was that was waging from time to time within her. She never heard of renunciation in others without being stirred to the depths of her nature. That she had herself felt some call towards the life of renunciation, I had often guessed from her quick remarks or questions, and from the peculiar influence which Cyril always exercised upon her. But she was not prepared to give up. She wanted to drink the cup of happiness to the very dregs. She could not turn her back on the brightness of this present world, although she could deeply reverence—and almost fear—those who did. And just now she did not want to think about these things. The contrast was something too sharp,

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perhaps. And I suppose that people never put from them what they believe to be the higher part of themselves, and deliberately fling themselves into a vortex of amusement with the half-unconscious desire of burying thought, without losing something, and running into the danger of temptation.

After that evening I saw Sylvia several times at receptions or concerts or flower-shows. She seemed to me to be everywhere, still looking as radiant and tireless as though in her first week, and always delighted to get a little chat with me, and tell me how delightful everything was. She never now asked me about Cyril, Dorothy, or Edith. I think she did not wish even to think about them. She was always followed by a train of cavaliers, whom she treated with the most provoking equality and friendliness. If she could secure my attention for a short time, she would dismiss her whole train with a little wave of the hand and an unconscious queenliness that was most amusing and bewitching. It was as if she said to them—

"I have got somebody better now, I want none of you for the present!" And the faces of the disconsolate youths thus made to give way to an old woman old enough to be their grandmother was a study in itself! Sylvia, who had plenty of humour in her composition, was partially aware of it herself, and would give me one of her merry arch glances as the train mournfully dispersed.

"They are very nice," she would say. "But,

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oh, so exactly alike! I wish they could all be numbered like cabmen and wear badges, so that one need not have to try and remember their names! They do feel so pained in their minds when one mixes them up! And how can one help it when they all dress precisely alike and say exactly the same thing every time? They are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee exactly!" and then her silvery laugh would ring out, and for very sympathy I must join in it.

This sort of thing went on until one day early in July.

Meantime Edith and Dorothy were settling down to their new life, and I was reassured both by letters and personal interviews from time to time that they were happy, and beginning to feel the spell of the toilers in the great city falling upon them. I should have been glad if I could have persuaded them to spend Sunday with me at first, to make a break in the monotony of the new life whilst it was still quite fresh; but the enthusiasm and ardour of the young was upon both, and the charm of hearing Cyril preach in St. Chads was an attraction I could well understand. Instead, I spent one Sunday with them, and heard my young St. George deliver a simple yet fiery discourse in his own church, which was almost crowded with men who had been especially invited "to be flayed alive," as the youngest of the Brotherhood privately informed me. Certainly Cyril did not spare them, but they came at his invitation, and they listened to

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him with an intentness which was impressive. I suppose he could not have got them regularly to church yet; but no one could see those faces or hear that sermon without realizing that Cyril was fighting his battle with a considerable amount of success. A street-fight in the parish had terminated in the death of one of the combatants only that very week. This had determined Cyril to preach this sermon, and had filled his church for him, as he himself told me; yet I do not think that a fatal fight in that district a year ago would have brought the men to church to hear their clergyman's lesson upon it as it did that day.

But I was scarcely as well satisfied by Cyril's looks as by the rest that I saw and heard that day. I find it hard to define the impression produced, for although looking worn and pale, he did not appear ill, nor is the pressure at St. Chads very great just now. All the Brotherhood agreed to that, and it is proved by the fact that all are taking holiday in rotation with a clear conscience. Yet there is something about Cyril which used not to be there of old, an increase of gentleness, perhaps, certainly a wider outlook in some respects; the same devotion to his work, and yet a note of depression sometimes, which is not the depression of discouragement. I feel uneasy about him without being able to define my uneasiness. Some element has come into his life which has touched it, perhaps, to finer issues, yet which has done something to sadden

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him in the present. Had he seen more of Sylvia O'Connor, I might have thought it the result of that mutual attraction and repulsion which exercises so strong an influence upon them both; but latterly they have hardly met—indeed, save for a chance encounter, they have not met, to my knowledge, since the night of the fire. That may have something to do with the change I rather apprehend than see in him. Dorothy says she believes he "has forgotten that frivolous Sylvia, and a good thing too;" but I do not think Cyril is of the stuff that forgets.

It was just one week after I had spent that day in Filey Street that Sylvia came to me in answer to the invitation I had given her. I was sitting at my solitary Sunday breakfast, which seems a little more solitary on Sunday than on others days from the absence of letters and papers, when the door opened and Sylvia came in quickly—came in so speedily on the heels of Miller that I had not even caught the name before I saw her advancing towards me with that skimming, eager step of hers which is one of her great charms.

"I have come to you at last," she said, as she stooped to kiss me. "Please don't send me away. You know you said I might spend Sunday with you sometimes. I never could before, but I've got away at last. Take pity on me and take me in. I am so weary of it all, so unspeakably weary! Here there will be some peace. I am just longing for it!"

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She turned away abruptly for a moment as if to take off her hat and lay it aside; but when she turned round to me again, I saw that her face was pale and that her lips were quivering. Miller was softly setting another place at table. I motioned to him to lay it near my own, and when he had gone I gave her some tea and saw her swallow a few mouthfuls before I let her talk. I had never seen her in this mood before. It was not the softened, chastened frame of mind I had seen in her after her marvellous escape from the fire; there was revolt and resistance in her eyes and a quivering appeal on her lips, such as one sees sometimes in the face of a little child, whose playthings have been taken away and the current of present joyousness interrupted. That something had occurred to disturb the golden glamour in which she had been living I could not doubt, and when her eyes met mine with a mute appeal for sympathy and comfort, I put a direct question.

"Is anything the matter, Sylvia?"

"I think everything is the matter!" she answered, with sudden soft vehemence. "Everything seems spoiled, broken, horrid! And it was all so beautiful before. Why can't people let me alone? Why can't I be happy without making other people miserable? I was enjoying it all so much, and now everything is hateful and miserable!" and the bright raindrops welled up and fell over, and a little sob broke the thread of her words.

But she had said enough to give me the clue,

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and quickly she told me all in a broken but sufficiently coherent way. From the very outset of her society career she had had offers, as I knew; but at first only from regular men of the world, whom she had dismissed without a qualm. But latterly it had been different. She had had offers from some whose hearts were really touched, who loved her, for the moment at any rate, with the fervour and ardour of youth, and with whom she had been on such pleasant terms of intimacy that it had been terribly hard to send them away crushed and heart-broken. And the sting of the thing was that they had believed themselves favoured by her, had taken her pretty, innocent tokens of liking and preference for indications of a warmer feeling, and the girl was consumed by a remorseful horror lest she had gone too far and given them cause to call her a trifler—a flirt.

"Women say so of me, I know!" she cried, with a fresh burst of tears. Somehow Sylvia looked prettier when she cried than when she smiled, a thing I have never seen in any other person. "I have heard them! But oh, Lady Wylmington, indeed, indeed I never meant it. I was so happy myself. People liked me and I liked them, and everything was so delicious! I liked them to like me. I can't help being pleased when they send me flowers, and they are delighted when I wear them. Why must it all be spoiled? Why can't I enjoy myself to the end as other girls do? It does seem so hard, when I haven't done any harm! And to be thought cruel and heartless and a flirt!

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Why, even Jem told me yesterday that it was very 'rough on fellows the way I took them up and played with them, and then cast them off like an old glove.' Jem said that! and I always trusted him to be kind to me through everything!" and the tears fell faster and faster.

I could see it all so plainly—her side—and the other one too. To her it had been all a delightful new experience, enjoyed thoroughly, without a thought of harm; but the feverish thirst after perpetual pleasure can never be indulged for long together without a certain deadening of the finer and more delicate sensibilities, and the atmosphere of adulation in which Sylvia had lived all these weeks had intoxicated her without her being aware of it. She had meant no harm. She had only wanted to be happy; but she had had no time for thought—for the girding on of the defensive armour of which we had once spoken, and which would have been her protection against such moments of disillusionment and remorse. Whilst being in the world, where her lot was cast, she had forgotten to seek with heart and soul to be kept from the evil. She had not even seen the evil or thought of it; and now with this first awakening had come a sense of unreality and bitterness, that for the moment upheaved the very foundations beneath her. With her extraordinary quickness she seemed to follow the train of my unspoken thought, and throwing herself at my feet, she suddenly exclaimed—

"Yes, yes, I know it was my fault. You told

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me how to keep my heart pure amidst it all, and I have not done it. I did try at first; but I soon forgot it. It was all so delightful, I didn't want to think grave thoughts or to be different from everybody; and I didn't see any harm in it. And now all the pleasure is taken out of everything. I feel as though I should never be the same again! Oh, I wonder if I should have been really happier if I had joined Edith and Dorothy at St. Chads."

Still that same haunting thought of the tremendous renunciation (for of course to such a one as Sylvia it would be this) of which I was always seeing glimpses in my intercourse with this bright girl. I never heard her speak of any middle course. The choice with her seemed always to lie between the life of unbroken gaiety and pleasure-seeking, such as she saw in her aunt's house, or the absolute and entire devotion to the cause of the poor that was exemplified in the lives of Cyril and his associates. I do not think anything save those two alternatives had ever presented itself to her mental vision.

"You would scarcely be fitted for such a life as that, Sylvia," I answered; "and your parents would not consent to it for you—and rightly. You are not old enough for the strain of such work. Even in hospitals girls are not admitted before they are one or two and twenty; and that is not such really hard work on the whole as what Edith and Dorothy are doing now."

She looked at me almost pitifully, as though I was robbing her of her last hope of escape from an unspoken and undefined sense of peril.

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"Am I never to be of any use in the world then?" she asked, with her childlike directness. "Shall I never be fit for anything but a useless butterfly?"

"I am not prepared to admit that a butterfly is useless," I answered, caressing her soft hair with my hand as she sat at my feet. "I believe God has a use and purpose for everything in His creation, even if it is only to make glad the hearts of His children by its brightness and beauty. I hope with your wealth, beauty, and influence you will become a great power for good in your own world, Sylvia; or in whatever sphere it may be that your lot is eventually cast."

"But I am not worthy to renounce all? I am not fit for life at St. Chads?"

"At present, no. You have had no training for it, the plunge would be too great. Your outward circumstances do not admit it. But for the other question—renunciation—Sylvia, my dear, do you not yet understand that there is only one act of renunciation asked of us, and that that is asked of all alike, and can be made by each one of us regardless of circumstances?"

She turned her face upwards towards me with a wondering question in her eyes.

"I don't understand," she said. "What can I renounce?"

"Self," I answered gravely. "That is the act of renunciation asked of each child of Christ. You may phrase it as you will; but it comes to that. As John the Baptist put it, when Christ had come to him, 'He must increase, but I must decrease';

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and so it is with each one of us when Christ comes into our lives. We must lose ourselves in Him, and the rest He will settle for us in His good time. It may be that the outward circumstances of our lives will never change, that our duty lies just where we have been placed, and that we remain outwardly unchanged by the growing change within us. It may be that He will lead us out into another world, to fight another battle, and that we may have to make other renunciations too, of which the world will be aware more than we ourselves. But that is an outward detail only. The core, the essence of the whole matter is the renunciation of self. He must increase—we must decrease. His Will must be ours—ours must be lost in His. And this—the one and only renunciation asked of us—can be made by every Christian alike, irrespective of station or circumstance. That is the characteristic of all work of God—it can be accepted and carried out by every creature in every place. It is the truest test I know of the Divine perfection of Christ's way as compared with any human method."

Sylvia sat very still and quiet after I had said this. I was sure that with her quick apprehension she would enter into the meaning of the thought; but how would it affect her?

She suddenly drew a long breath and looked up again gravely.

"That is much harder," she said very seriously, "than even giving up everything to work at St. Chads."

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"Much harder," I assented quietly.

Again a long silence fell upon her, so long that I felt I must break it, and I did so by putting into words the thought which had suggested itself to me.

"'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.'"

Sylvia stayed with me all the rest of that day. She was very gentle and thoughtful and sweet, but did not speak openly of her affairs again.

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CHAPTER X

A CONCERT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

CHILL October had come and was drawing to a close. The changes of season were chiefly noticeable at St. Chads by the rising or fall of temperature. There was no freshness and beauty of spring, no glory of summer, no rich ripening of autumn fruits.

October at St. Chads portended a rise in the price of coals, a difficulty in getting work, shortening days, and smaller wages. There was no sentiment about autumn, only the somewhat dreary outlook of a hard struggle for a living during the next few months.

The Rector and his fellow-workers, however, were prepared to face the coming winter with brave hearts. The prospect was far brighter than when Cyril came to St. Chads a year ago. His enthusiasm had proved infectious, and there centred round him a small but eager band of workers ready to do his bidding. They were all poor

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people, but loving hearts and willing hands may find much work to do for God. The church, for example, was cleaned week by week by a band of women who refused all payment for their work, and the necessary repairs were executed by workmen at odd hours free of charge; there was a voluntary choir, and an excellent staff of Sunday-school teachers. Benefit clubs also had sprung into life, so that there was hope that the dire distress of the previous winter might be averted in some measure.

A workmen's club had been set afloat, was self-supporting, and well managed by a committee of working-men, who came of their own free-will to ask Mr. Benson to be their president. He accepted the office with pleasure, but expressed a wish that they should make their own rules and work the club on their own lines. He was ready to give an opinion when consulted on any point, but never attempted to dictate.

Cyril had also been able to carry out a favourite project of his which had been in his mind ever since he came to St. Chads. A crying want had been some room which might be devoted entirely to purposes of recreation. The dead level of dullness of the lives of his parishioners weighed on his mind like a nightmare, and he felt that nothing could be done to brighten them until he could obtain possession of some hall which might be used for all purposes of amusement.

By a lucky chance a Dissenting chapel that could not pay its way, and was therefore closed,

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was offered for sale. Cyril bought it, pulled down the chapel, and erected on its site a large iron room capable of holding several hundreds of people, which might serve as a concert-room, lecture-hall, or, in short, be used for any of the numerous purposes which awoke from time to time in Cyril's busy brain.

He had just paid his first visit of inspection since the hall had been completed, and he passed from the bright fresh room with its pretty cheerful fittings into the squalid street with a pleased smile on his face. Here was his room ready for use, and he already pictured it as becoming gradually the centre of brightness and recreation in his parish, rivalling perhaps in time with its varied attractions the neighbouring gin-palace. There should be a flourish of trumpets at the opening ceremony, and suddenly there floated before his mind Sylvia O'Connor and her promised entertainment. Ah! that indeed would shed a glory over the hall that would rest on it for ever. He pulled out his watch. It was late. He had been out since the morning, and now the daylight was waning. He was tired and hungry. He would go back to the Rectory, and after tea he would write to Sylvia and ask her to come and open the hall. He found himself hurrying through the streets, tempted on by that beautiful vision, but as he walked his pace gradually slackened, and the vision faded.

It would not do, he thought. He had made a silent vow after that last meeting at Fulham that of his own free-will he would never meet Sylvia

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again. His love for her had passed the bounds of friendship. Away from her he could master it, and put it from him; in her presence he was liable to lose all self-control. The mere mention of her name set his pulses bounding; the sight of her face, the sound of her voice, even the light glistening of her hair, filled his heart with an irresistible craving that would not be allayed. This love of his was a passion that must be crushed out; and its only cure was complete separation. He must never see her. If she volunteered to come he must refuse the offer, however churlish it might make him appear, but the chances were ten to one against her ever giving the matter a second thought. She had probably forgotten all about it. Very soon, doubtless, he would hear that she was going to be married, and that would put an end to his day-dream.

This was the conclusion that he had arrived at as he let himself quietly in at the Rectory with his latch-key. Already the gas was lighted in the hall. A fragrant scent of tea and toast saluted his nostrils, sounds of women's voices and light laughter broke on his ear through the half-opened door of the library, and what was the astonishing sight that met his eyes as he pushed the door fully open, and stood transfixed in the doorway?

Dorothy, seated at the table, busied herself with the tea-things, a kettle sang merrily on the fire, and before it on the rug sat Sylvia O'Connor, the firelight glistening on her hair, the beautiful face aglow with animation. There were others in

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the room, but Cyril only saw Sylvia. She turned her head quickly and was the first to become aware of his presence. Then she sprang to her feet with a ripple of laughter.

"He can't speak, Edith. He is struck dumb by our impertinence. He comes home, poor soul, for peace and quietness, a cigar and a cup of tea, and he finds—four women!"

Then Cyril realized that his beautiful vision was a reality, and his lately-formed good resolutions vanished like the morning dew in the sunshine of the presence of the girl that he loved.

"You have come, then. You have come; you have not forgotten," and he strode across the room with eager welcome in his eyes. "But you gave me no warning. How *could* I be here to welcome you?"

Something in the kindling face caused Sylvia a passing shadow of uneasiness.

"I never knew that I should have a chance of coming. It is all owing to the kindness of Mrs. Wingfield," she said, turning towards a lady who sat by Edith's side. "She was in London, and I met her at luncheon to-day at your grandmother's. She told me she was coming to see Edith, and I asked her to take me with her. I wanted to see the girls, and to arrange with you about our concert."

Cyril turned to his other guests with graceful words of welcome.

"I am sorry to have missed any of your visit, but Dorothy has been sensible enough to entertain you in my absence. Have you been long here?"

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"About half-an-hour. We would not go away," broke in Sylvia, with a low laugh. "I believe your housekeeper was getting anxious and thought we had come to stay."

"I hope you have not come with any intention of stealing my parish-worker," said Cyril to Mrs. Wingfield, glancing with a smile at Edith.

"No," answered Mrs. Wingfield, with a quick sigh. "I am afraid my nestling has taken flight for good. She looks very well and happy, Mr. Benson. My husband wanted me to come and have a look at her, as I was passing through London."

"I can find you a chair, Miss O'Connor, unless you prefer the rug," said Cyril, turning again to Sylvia.

"Thank you, but with my usual selfishness I have chosen the only *really* comfortable place in the room."

"What! when my beautiful easy-chair is unoccupied!" cried Cyril gaily.

"There was an odour of sanctity about it. We left it for its rightful owner," retorted Sylvia.

"Do sit down, Cyril, and have your tea. You look tired to death," said Dorothy impatiently.

Sylvia puckered her pretty forehead, and studied Cyril with careful consideration.

"Dorothy is right," she said quite gravely. "You look tired and ill. You are thin too."

"Tired and *dirty* rather. I look *ever* so much nicer when I am clean. I am quite well, thank you."

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"Is he?" persisted Sylvia, turning to Dorothy, but the question remained unanswered, for a whiff of something savoury preceded Mrs. Upton, who with dignified displeasure came into the room bearing a tray.

"I have brought your lunch, sir."

"What a kind, thoughtful creature you are, Mrs. Upton. They are accusing me of awful things, of looking thin and ill, but they will see for themselves it is impossible to be either one or the other if one is under your care."

The compliment did not avert the feared rebuke.

"You might keep well enough, sir, if you only tried to come home a little more regular to meals," and Mrs. Upton swept from the room.

"You will tell my grandmother how well I am kept in order," said Cyril, with a smile, to Mrs. Wingfield.

He made a mere pretence of a meal, and quickly pushed the tray from him.

"I am waiting to receive orders," said Sylvia. "I can see Mrs. Wingfield is getting in a hurry to go. Do you want an entertainment, and if so, when? It must be soon if I am to have a hand in it, as we are off to Monckton Court in a fortnight at the latest."

"I want it as soon as ever you can provide it, but I want it really good. Comic songs, I suppose, are inevitable, but please let them be really funny, and you won't let the comic element entirely outweigh the other, will you?"

"But what if I am not able to get up this

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exceedingly superior entertainment at so short a notice?" Sylvia said, with a light mockery in her tone.

"I do not want to dictate," Cyril said, with a smile, "but I am ambitious that our first entertainment should be exceptionally good, a brilliant success. I am about to open a recreation-room. It is my latest scheme, and you must be lenient over my weakness."

"Very well, as you have confided in me you shall have your reward. You shall have a really beautiful evening," cried Sylvia merrily. "I have already laid my plans. I have enlisted Jem's services, and he is throwing himself heart and soul into it, and has secured promises of help from one or two of his musical friends. Oh, by the way, Lady Wylmington has promised to come and look after us all."

"She would have come anyway," said Cyril, with a little laugh. "I shall write to her to-night."

"You are sure she will do anything you ask?" said Sylvia, looking up archly into Cyril's face.

"Certainly! Anything in reason."

"One more detail. Are we to come in evening or morning dress?"

"My people will think more of it if you come in pretty clothes," Cyril said hesitatingly.

"Which, being interpreted, means evening dress for the men and a sort of demi-toilette for the ladies, I suppose. You shall have the programme on Saturday, and we can come to-day week if you like."

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A few more details were arranged, and then Mrs. Wingfield rose to go.

"It was very good of you to come," said Cyril, in a low voice, as he helped Sylvia into her jacket. "I thought you would forget."

"Even society girls remember some things and have a faint sense of gratitude," answered Sylvia, raising her eyes quickly to his face, "and in this case gratitude and pleasure go hand in hand. I like coming, and am delighted you have accepted my offer. I was half afraid of being snubbed."

Sylvia little knew that the acceptance was entirely due to the effect of her personal presence.

A few minutes later and Cyril was alone. He poked up the fire, drew his easy-chair towards it, and stretched out his hand for a match. A cigarette would clear his brain. This, then, was the climax of his wise resolutions. Sylvia had come, and was coming again. The very spot where she had rested on the rug seemed sacred in his eyes, the picture of her as she sat there was enshrined in his heart. A resistless fate was bearing him along, against his will and judgment. He would struggle no more, he would float with the tide, and see where he was landed. He had not sought Sylvia's presence. Why should he shrink from all happiness as if it were an evil thing? Had she not been true to her higher self in fulfilling her promise? After all, she was the Sylvia of his dreams, and he was to see her again. All his hopes now seemed to centre on that Tuesday night, and after that the deluge!

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Then he roused himself, threw the end of his cigarette into the fire, and called himself a fool. After all he was still young, and the whole passion of his nature, hitherto habitually kept in check by a stern, if voluntary, asceticism, was roused into revolt.

Was it chance that had thrown him into sudden intimacy with this brilliant beauty, that had so quickly ripened this intimacy into love—such passionate love that he would willingly die for her sake? How was he to deal with it? Must he, like St. Anthony of old, regard it as a temptation that should be resisted and conquered by prayer and fasting, or might he rather accept it as a good gift of God that he might stretch out his hands and accept with tears and thanksgiving?

Cyril was bewildered, dazzled, confused. For a time he had lost the sense of God's guiding hand, and was drifting he knew not whither.

All was bustle and preparation during the next few days at St. Chads in expectation of the coming entertainment. Cyril determined that the room should be gaily decorated for the opening ceremony.

"The flags will be always a useful possession," he said, "and for this night only we will have our platform gay with plants."

He stipulated that the girls of the parish should carry out the actual work of decoration under the direction of Dorothy and Edith. He wished from the first that the people should take a pride and pleasure in this room.

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By six o'clock on the memorable Tuesday the room was finished, and Dr. Trevor and Cyril came in to pass a final judgment on the general effect. The sight which met their eyes was wonderfully pretty and artistic, and reflected great credit on the workers.

"Well, Benson, I hope you are satisfied?" said Dr. Trevor, as Cyril glanced round with a critical eye.

"I am more than satisfied: I am delighted and thankful. If this room fulfils its mission it will prove a worthy handmaid to the church."

"You are as sanguine and enthusiastic as a child, Benson," answered Dr. Trevor, a little dryly. "You go through the world expecting to work miracles, and you can only meet with disappointment."

"One aims higher than one will reach," Cyril said in an undertone, "but one cannot afford to lower one's ambition or to give up hoping and striving after the very best. When I lose that hope I shall die."

Long before eight o'clock the place was choked to overflowing. Even the street outside was blocked by a good-natured crowd, who waited to see the visitors from the West End arrive.

The omnibus that had been hired to bring Sylvia and her friends drew up in a perfect sea of faces, and it was with a half-frightened expression that she looked out, seeking amongst them one face that she knew.

At the door of the hall, however, were Cyril and the Brotherhood waiting to receive them.

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The first person Cyril inquired for was Lady Wylmington, as he opened the door ready for his visitors to alight.

"I am here, Cyril."

The kindly, gentle hand was laid in his, and the understanding pressure gave him a feeling of nameless content.

"Now I feel sure my evening will be a triumph," he said, as he led her off on his arm. "I have promised Dorothy and Edith that they shall sit by you."

"Sylvia has taken a lot of trouble about all this," said Lady Wylmington, "and is managing her crew with an astonishing ease and grace. I have seen a good deal of it. There have been rehearsals at my house, consultations about suitable songs, etc., for Mrs. Carew has been rather damping about the whole thing, so that for the most part the arrangements have been made with me."

"As usual you have helped the thing to go, I suppose," said Cyril gratefully. "I see that Jem Carew has favoured us with his presence, if his mother is conspicuous by her absence."

"He has been very good-natured and kind about it all. Of course he is quite at Sylvia's beck and call, like a good many others," said Lady Wylmington, with a smile.

"Well, I must go back to the others. The audience is growing impatient. There is a nice little room behind for all the performers. You must look at it afterwards," and Cyril hurried away.

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Sylvia was looking pleased and excited. She had provided an excellent entertainment, and her helpers were intent on making the evening a successful one.

There was a first-rate violinist, who was accompanied by his sister. Dr. Trevor, in the course of the evening, gave one or two excellent recitations. There were the usual bass and tenor soloists. The only lady singer besides Sylvia was a Miss Cruikshank, with a fine contralto voice. She was a dark, rather handsome woman of about thirty, a little over-dressed for the occasion, and her style of singing suffered from over-much cultivation. Her choice of song, too, was not wholly suitable to her audience. Her singing was clever without being sympathetic. The greatest triumph of the evening was undoubtedly left to Sylvia.

Cyril, who kept to no particular seat, but moved about at will among his people, talking to one and another as he passed, was standing at the end of the room amongst a group of lads, when Sylvia made her first appearance on the platform.

An involuntary murmur of admiration broke from the crowd about him. She stood there in her simple white dress, high to the throat, with sleeves falling away from her rounded arms, with a half-smile on her face as she looked at the people before her. A bright colour was in her cheeks, her eyes shone like stars, rivalling in brightness the diamond pin in her hair. The only spot of colour about her was a spray of crimson flowers that was fastened into her dress.

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She sang with the unconscious ease and grace of perfect training. Her song was a simple, well-chosen, English ballad. Every note rang true and sweet as a bird, and each word could be heard in the farthest corner of the room.

There was a storm of applause as she finished, an encore that would take no refusal. On all sides Cyril heard homely but kindly comments on her singing and her beauty. Yes; he was sure now that beauty also was one of God's good gifts. He felt its unconsciously softening effect even on the rough men about him. The encore was accorded.

Sylvia sang again at the end of the evening. She was thrilled and touched by her reception, and she sang her very best. She felt a kind of electric sympathy between herself and her audience.

A few chords were struck on the piano, and Sylvia began singing "Home, sweet home."

God knows that many of the homes in St. Chads were anything but a credit to their owners, that there were sickening sights and sounds within a stone's throw of the room where they were gathered. Yet there is a sentiment in the old song, a lilt in the words, that move even the hardest heart to an answering thrill.

Tears gathered in the eyes of hard-featured women and stole unbidden down their faces, while some of the men shuffled uneasily in their seats. They were troubled, and did not exactly know why, and Cyril realized with a beating heart that there was a new teacher among them; a beautiful

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girl, with a pure, strong voice, whose sweet singing was appealing to the very hearts of his people as no sermon of his had ever done.

She ceased, and after a moment's pause there rose again the deafening storm of applause. Cyril moved quickly to the room beyond the stage to see if Sylvia were willing to sing again.

"I cannot," she said, with a look of almost piteous appeal. "It is too exciting. Your people are so enthusiastic and so interesting. I have never sang to an audience like this. I am so tired, I should break down."

The colour had faded from her face, which was as white now as her own gown. She was trembling from head to foot.

"You shall not sing again," said Cyril reassuringly. "Come back and show yourself, and I will tell them you are tired."

He led her back on to the platform, gave the necessary explanation, and the evening ended with "God save the Queen." Three cheers were given by the audience, a rough-and-ready method of expressing a vote of thanks, but more sincere possibly than such thanks usually are.

With the dispersing of the crowd Sylvia's courage and colour returned. She was all gaiety and sparkle.

"Are you satisfied? Did it go off well?" she asked, when Cyril rejoined her.

"It has been a glorious success. I don't know how to thank you and your friends. It has been an evening we shall none of us forget."

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He moved away from Sylvia to thank the other friends who had helped to make the opening night of the room so bright and successful, but he joined her again as she stood waiting at the door for the omnibus. She was wrapped in soft furs, and lifted her bright face to his with a smile that had something pathetic in it.

"I am afraid it is good-bye for the winter," she said. "We are off to Monckton on Saturday, but I hope we may meet again in the spring."

A sudden resolution formed itself in Cyril's mind. Why should he not lay this ghost that for ever haunted him, by putting his fate to the test?

"I think I will call to-morrow if you will let me, and see if you are quite knocked up with all your kind exertions on my behalf, and thank you properly for them if I can. I shall have had time to think it over. To-night gratitude makes me dumb. You don't know how prettily I can express myself when I try."

He spoke playfully, but his dark eyes shone with such burning earnestness that Sylvia's fell before them.

"You will actually take the trouble to come and call!" she answered, with a shade of embarrassment in her manner. "Come to tea, then. I believe, though, that Aunt Annie has an engagement for to-morrow. Can you come the next day?"

"I think I will still come to-morrow if you do not mind. It is a free day with me," Cyril said,

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with a strange thrill in his voice. "Remember me to Mrs. Carew, and tell her I am sorry a headache hindered her putting in an appearance to-night."

"Yes, to-morrow I will tell her all, and hear what she has to say to me. She is coming at present between my work and me. She haunts me like a beautiful ghost. When she has definitely refused me, I can pull myself together and settle down again, but not till then."

So thought Cyril as he wended his way home that night.

True to his promise, he presented himself at Park Lane the next afternoon.

"Yes, Miss O'Connor was at home," said the butler.

Cyril followed him with noiseless steps up the thickly-carpeted stairs, feeling oppressed by the sense of luxury about him and the bootlessness of his errand. Was it likely that a girl brought up in luxury like this could face a life like his own? He almost wished that he had never come.

Sylvia came forward to greet him, a shade paler than usual, and with less gaiety of manner. She was alone, Cyril noted with a sigh of relief. She busied herself with little attentions, and chattered on about the night before, as she handed him his tea, and he sat there silent, absorbed, overcome with the importance of his mission.

"You look as solemn as if you were going to

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preach a sermon," she said, with a rather uneasy laugh.

"No," he said; "but I have come to tell you of a fancy that haunts me night and day. I, at any rate, want your sympathy. Will you give it me?"

"Yes," murmured Sylvia, but there was a catch in her voice as she gave the assent.

"I love you, Sylvia, as well, I think, as it is possible for one human being to love another, and in my presumption I have sometimes wondered if you could love me in return. I have struggled with it for months, and it still haunts me, the beautiful vision of you by my side, sharing my life, helping me in my work, till I can bear it no longer. I have come to you to dispel it, to wake me up from my dream. One little laugh of yours will bring me to my senses, and my illusion will melt into thin air."

No answering laugh broke the momentary silence, for Sylvia sat with clasped hands and eyes dilated with emotion gazing at Cyril's face.

"You want me to marry you?" she said at last, with something like a sob.

"I want to hear from your own lips that you *cannot* marry me," he said, turning his white face towards her. "It is, I think, probably the only time I shall ever talk to you of the love that has been burning my heart out for the last few months, ever since the fire, which showed me plainly, for the first time, the depth of the love I have for you. I know the life you lead, and the contrast it presents to my own, and that knowledge has kept

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me silent; but last night as you stood on the platform, and I became conscious that you with your gifts of beauty and quick sympathy could appeal to the hearts of my people as I am powerless to do, I wondered if after all it would be wicked to come and ask you if you could love me well enough to come and share my life and work. Remember, dear" (and his voice sank almost to a whisper), "I don't expect that you can do this thing, but the desire for it in my own heart has become intolerable. It is eating into my life. I kept away from you as long as I could, and now I have come to put it before you, to tell you the truth, and you will lay your kind hand on my sore heart, and in some measure you will heal it. I will bear it if you refuse me, but I can no longer bear uncertainty."

Then Sylvia sprang to her feet.

"I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!" she cried, breaking into sobs. "You love *me!* I know the gift you offer, but I cannot take it. I dare not. I should only make you miserable. Your fancy paints me in untrue colours. Mine is not a nature that could satisfy the depths of yours."

"To me you are the sweetest woman in all the world," said Cyril simply; "the one and only woman I shall ever want to marry. I felt I had no chance of winning you, but yet—I came."

"I don't want to marry yet," continued Sylvia piteously. "I am so young, and to marry any one is such an awfully solemn thing."

"Yes, you are only a child after all," Cyril

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answered, tenderly and very sadly. "I ought not to have come—I see it all now. I have been mad, blind, selfish; carried away, I fear, by the strength of my love for you. Forgive me, my dear; I will go away."

He spoke like one dazed by a heavy blow.

"No," said Sylvia passionately. "I want rather to ask your forgiveness. Ah! that I of all people should give you pain—you to whom I owe my very life;" and she stretched out her hands to him.

He took them, and held them fast, but his own strong hands shook.

"My dear," he said, "never think that a shadow of blame rests upon you. Is it your fault that those who come in contact with you cannot help loving you? I should have held my tongue a little longer. Listen, dear. Don't cry. The love I have for you is a very sacred possession. I would not be without it, although just now it is so strong it makes me unhappy. I want you to think when I bid you good-bye to-day that in time to come this love will be a very beautiful memory, that will sweeten my life and help me in my work. Believe me, you have taught me many things, Sylvia."

"And you will go away, and I shall never see you again, and only think of you as one that I have hurt and injured. I shall lose my friend," said Sylvia, raising her eyes full of tears to Cyril's face. "I shall so miss the friend whom I revere and honour more than any man in the world."

Cyril winced.

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"Thank you for the kind words, but I am afraid I must not meet you any more. I cannot think or speak of you as a friend. You are my first, my only love. I want you *always*, or—it is better that I should not see you."

"And I want you too, but *not* your work—*not* St. Chads," cried Sylvia, snatching her hands from him, and throwing herself on to the sofa, hiding her face in her agony of shame. "I am wicked, I tell you, and selfish, not the girl you think me; but I think—I think I am nearer loving you than any man in the world. I could love you in time as well as I could love any one, but it is not in my nature to care for anybody as you care for me. I love myself best of all. I could not give up for your sake. You were ready to die for me."

"And would die for you still, gladly," said the gentle voice behind her.

"And I—I—" went on Sylvia passionately, "I *could* not live at St. Chads; I *could* not give myself up to the fight with poverty, and sin, and dirt, not even with you by my side, and yet I cannot let you go. Help me, Cyril. What can I do? I am so miserable."

With perfect self-abnegation Cyril put aside his own sorrow to comfort Sylvia.

"My darling," he said, lightly touching the bent head before him, "I was very wrong to put you in this plight. You want me to understand that under other circumstances you could care enough about me in time to marry me?"

"Yes," said Sylvia.

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Her sobs grew fainter. She was listening to him breathlessly.

"And I," he went on, "have grown so used to my surroundings, that I did not, until I came here this afternoon, sufficiently consider the shock they would be to any one accustomed to luxury like this. It is like your true, sweet self to let me know that you care for me even a little, and to send me home with that sweet comfort. I had not dreamed of taking you to a house like my present one. It would not have been right. I should have tried to make it a fitting home for you, and I should have sent you away for a long holiday every year. Still I can see the sacrifice was too large a demand."

"You will always live at St. Chads?" asked Sylvia, in a whisper. "You will never take a country living?"

There was a pause, and Sylvia lifted her face to see if Cyril were still by her side.

His face was grey with emotion, his dark eyes were full of tears. He spoke at last huskily.

"Not even for you, my dear, could I leave St. Chads—not till God calls me."

Sylvia threw herself back on the sofa with a little moan.

"I told you I was wicked. I try to tempt even you to do wrong," she said; "but one thing you shall know. I never tried to make you love me. I was always happy and at ease with you, for they told me—some one told me—that you thought it wrong to marry."

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"That is one of the mistakes that knowing you has taught me to avoid, Sylvia. Loving you has made me a better man. Remember, I shall always be thankful that I met you, thankful that through you I have learned to appreciate the power of some of God's good gifts that had no meaning for me before. Your beauty and your kindliness will serve, I think, to rub off some of the angles of my rougher nature; will make me gentler and more sympathetic in my work. I will not stay longer. Thank you for giving me my answer so gently. Good-bye, my darling, good-bye."

For one instant Cyril took the girl in his arms and kissed her. Then he was gone.

Not till he was fairly out of the house and wandering, he did not know whither, did he realize that that chapter of his life was closed, that he had risked his all, and lost it.

He never quite knew what happened for the next few hours. He walked ceaselessly up and down the streets, till at last he found himself on one of the great bridges that go over the Thames. He rested his arms on the wall and looked down on the water. Thousands of lights were reflected on the river, a cold wind was breaking its surface into tiny waves. Around was the ceaseless roar of traffic, mingled with the hum of voices, and as Cyril rested there he thought of the millions of souls in the great city, each with its individual load of sorrow to carry, that none could lighten but God, and he shivered with the sense of his own awful isolation.

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Below, the river lapped against the pillars of the bridge. Suddenly Cyril became conscious of a presence there, a woman crouched close to the water, gazing—gazing into its sullen turbid depths. Something in her despairing attitude gave Cyril a foreboding of evil.

"That poor creature means to drown herself," he thought, and very softly he sought and found the stone steps that led down to the banks of the river.

She was seated on the bottom step, her chin resting in her hand, her face turned always to the river. She looked like some lithe animal crouched ready to spring. The clock of St. Paul's boomed the hour of ten. She rose to her feet, and seemed about to prepare for that final jump into eternity, but turned, like an angry animal brought to bay, as Cyril laid a strong detaining hand on her arm.

"What are you going to do?" said Cyril sternly. "Come from the river this instant."

The woman re-seated herself, looking full into Cyril's face with an insolent laugh. He saw with pain that she was young and handsome, although her features bore the unmistakable marks of drink and vice.

"Who told you to come with your sneaking ways and interfere with me? The country is as free to me as it is to you. Go your way, and leave me to go mine," she broke out angrily.

"You are not free to take away your life, and I shall not go away till you come with me," said

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She was seated on the bottom step.—p. 242.

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Cyril quietly. "If you come without a fuss, I will see you to a safe lodging for the night."

"The lock-up?" questioned the girl, with a glance into Cyril's face.

"Not if you do as I tell you," reiterated Cyril.

"And if I refuse?" said the woman, with a mocking laugh.

"I shall call a policeman, so you have your choice. I have no time to spare—it is getting late. If you come with me it must be *at once*."

Something in Cyril's decided manner cowed the girl, and she rose uneasily to her feet.

"Go first then, and I will follow," she said sullenly.

"No," Cyril answered. "I don't trust you. Give me your hand, and I will lead you up the steps."

Wonderingly she took the proffered hand, the hand that had so lately touched Sylvia's, and Cyril led her firmly to the top. Then he released his hold. He was rapidly revolving in his mind where he could land his strange captive, and he remembered a Refuge about a mile away, where he knew one of the Sisters. He would take the woman to her.

"Now you can come with me and I will take you to a safe place for the night," he said.

"What will they think of a fine gentleman like you walking alongside of me?" answered his companion. "You mean well, but once more I tell you—let me go."

"I shall not let you go till you are better fitted to take care of yourself," said Cyril determinedly.

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They tramped on together, side by side, and by degrees Cyril elicited her sad history.

She was a Yorkshire girl who had run away to London with an artisan who had deserted her. Since then her downward course had been a rapid one. She had taken to drink, and was constantly being committed to prison for being "drunk and disorderly."

"I have had a good long spell of freedom now. I was taken up last at Henley in July, and they gave me a fortnight with hard labour because I hurt one of the bobbies," she said, with a fierce, unwomanly laugh.

At any rate the girl had not been in want of drink, thought Cyril, as he listened to the shameless recital. She was even now talking under strong excitement, and yet Cyril was filled with a passionate desire to save this poor soul.

It was with untold relief that he stopped at last at the door of the Refuge and asked to speak a word with Sister Agnes. Very briefly he told the woman's story, and asked that she might have a night's lodging, and that if possible she might be detained there the next day till he had thought of some plan for her future life. And then with a hasty farewell he started, tired out in brain and body alike, for his own home.

With that poor girl's further story this tale has nothing to do. Suffice it to say, that in future years a sad, repentant woman lived to bless the night when a young clergyman saved her from a suicidal death.

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It was past eleven when Cyril let himself in at his Rectory.

"You are quite knocked up, Benson," said Mr. Barrett anxiously, as he entered the study. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have," said Cyril, with a sad smile. "I have seen a ghost, and exorcised it. It will never haunt me again."

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CHAPTER XI

SYLVIA'S RETURN TO LONDON

Park Lane, Oct. 29.

I FEEL some day I shall do something desperate; marry a chimney-sweep, or run away with the milkman simply and solely to assert my independence. I have been chafing against lawful authority all the week, ever since I came back to join Aunt Annie, with whom I am to stay till father and mother return next spring.

I begin to long for that happy time. One is apt to question an aunt's right to interfere with one's plans, but I am sure I shall think mother is right about everything.

The particular hindrance I have experienced this week was about the plan for the concert that I promised to get up for Mr. Benson's parish. I set about it at once on my return, first of all enlisting Jem's sympathies on the subject. I

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determined from the first that he should help me, and he is doing it nobly. Aunt Annie, however, has been negatively disagreeable about it all the way through. She dare not openly oppose it, as Lady Wylmington supports me; but she is making it difficult for me.

"I don't like it, my dear," she says; "but you must take your own way about it. Young people generally do."

So I have "taken my own way" with a sense of wrong-doing which takes the joy out of things, yet all the time I believe I'm right. However, Aunt Annie's openly-expressed opposition has made Jem all the kinder to me about it. He has looked up all his musical friends. I had an opportunity of going to St. Chads with Mrs. Wingfield, who was passing through town, and who went to see Edith. They all seemed excessively surprised to see me. I believe all good people credit a society girl with a total incapacity for either keeping her word or having any depth of feeling. At any rate, Mr. Benson's greeting might lead me to suppose so. He was extremely surprised that I had remembered my promise, but he was pleased as well. He was particularly bright. He is much nicer at home than when one meets him at a party. Edith has certainly found her right vocation. She has lost her pretty colour, but has such a lovely expression. People are certainly ready-made saints who voluntarily live in an East End parish. St. Chads is beyond description in its dreary depression. I

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was able to arrange all details for the concert, which is to take place on Nov. 1, and to-night Jem and I dine at Lady Wylmington's and meet all our helpers, and we are to have a rehearsal of the musical part of our entertainment, which reminds me that it is time to go and dress.

Oct. 30.—I had a most amusing dinner-party last night. As we were asked for purposes of business, it was entirely informal, and we were such a funny, heterogeneous company. There was Captain Featherstone, a heavy dragoon, an utterly good-natured fellow with a boundless repertoire of sailor songs and hunting ditties, which he rolls out in a fine bass voice. He was Jem's catch, and a very good one indeed. He took in a Miss Cruikshank, our alto soloist, with a voice "just like a man's," as Jem says, meaning that she has a very deep contralto voice, of which she is not a little proud. She was our difficult friend. She is handsome, and quite old (about thirty!), and needs a deal of humouring. She would have been quite past my management but that happily she and Captain Featherstone developed an incipient flirtation over accompaniments. We all volunteered in turn to accompany her songs, but we none of us could suit her taste, not even Mr. Speer, who is a real musician, and plays the violin like an angel.

His accompanying was "far too mechanical," mine "much too loud," etc., etc.; at length Captain Featherstone offered to try, and his accompanying was happily "perfection!" so sympathetic, so

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understanding; and the worthy Captain pulled his moustaches and evidently felt Miss Cruikshank to be a woman of perception. The aforesaid Mr. Speer was our great stand-by, though severely classical in his musical taste, and he needed much persuasion before he could be convinced that the East End people would prefer something lively and showy on the violin to a study of Bach's, which, to the uninitiated ear, was distinctly dull. He and his sister, who accompanied him, take life gravely. They are both in the profession, *i.e.* they make music their object in life, and hope to make it pay some day. Next came Mr. Cochrane, our faultless little tenor, who sang as often as we liked, and let us choose his songs, and had no fads about his accompaniments, and flirted with nobody—a jewel of a helper.

I was much amazed by finding a vacant chair at my side at the dinner-table filled by Dr. Trevor, who had arrived after we had all gone in to dinner.

"You!" I cried, as I rose and shook hands. "Why, what brings you here to-night? You are not one of my helpers."

"I am sorry my presence disturbs you," said Dr. Trevor, with a good-humoured laugh. "I am afraid Lady Wylmington is to blame, for she certainly asked me to join the party."

"But you are a traitor in the camp. You will go and report our weaknesses to Mr. Benson," I persisted, when Dr. Trevor had finished his soup.

"You evidently regard me in the light of an

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art-critic, Miss O'Connor, who can only find fault," retorted Dr. Trevor.

"As you have come, you will certainly have to take a place on our programme," I said thoughtfully. "What can you do? Can you sing or play, or"—I added with a sudden inspiration—"*can* you play the banjo?"

"I am afraid my education is deficient on all these points, but unless your entertainment is to be entirely musical, I can recite."

"The very thing," I cried joyfully. "I told Jem I thought we ought to have a recitation or two, but we could not think of anybody that could do it. How very good of you to offer."

I felt a growing friendliness to Dr. Trevor.

"But I did not offer. Benson told me I was to come and see if you could make use of me," Dr. Trevor said, a little dryly.

"I knew Mr. Benson was the autocrat of the Brotherhood, and I see his rule extends to yourself," I said merrily. "Anyhow, it was kind of you to come. You shall give us two recitations, one grave, one gay, *very* gay, that will make us all laugh."

"Very well. Now I hope you will forgive Lady Wylmington for inviting me."

Later on in the evening, when there was a cessation of music, Dr. Trevor came and seated himself beside me.

"You never gave me your impression of St. Chads," he said. "I hear that you honoured us with a call the other day."

"Oh, yes; I went to see Edith and Dorothy

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I have long been wanting to pay them a visit, and it fitted in nicely with the arrangements for the concert. I saw the girls, and their lodgings, and the rectory, and the church. The church is very beautiful."

"And you thought it a nice place to live in?" inquired Dr. Trevor. He seemed determined to arrive at my real opinion.

"I think people must be saints to live there who can live anywhere else," I answered, fairly driven to bay. "Remember, you have forced me to give an opinion. Do you think Edith and Dorothy really like it?"

Dr. Trevor's face softened.

"Yes, I think they do. Miss Benson would be happy in a prison if her brother were there; and Miss Wingfield is happy in having such a wide field for her admirable capacity of helpfulness. I never saw such a helpful woman. How did you think she looked? Are we hurting her down there? Lookers-on see most of the game."

Dr. Trevor was speaking eagerly now. He was waiting for my answer.

"She struck me as pale; but I think she seemed quite well, and she has such a lovely expression," I said, catching the earnestness of his tone.

"Thank you," he answered, with evident relief. "To tell the truth, I was a little anxious at first whether the experiment would answer. She asked me about it when I was at Monckton, so I feel in a measure responsible."

"What does she do chiefly?" I asked, glad to

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pursue a subject which I saw interested Dr. Trevor so greatly.

"What does she *not* do, rather?" he said, with a kindling face. "She has a distinct talent for nursing, and I keep her pretty busy over that. Shall I tell you a tale? The other day a little child pulled a kettle of boiling water over itself, and scalded itself pretty well from head to foot. The mother was so frightened and helpless that she was worse than useless, so I fetched Miss Wingfield. Everything depended on the child's bandages being kept on, and that the scalds should be properly dressed. The child screamed all through the night, but Miss Wingfield kept her in her lap, tended her and soothed her, and obeyed my every direction. She sat up with her every night for a week, and practically saved her life."

"Then it will get well?" I asked breathlessly.

"Yes, it will live; but not many women who have not had a hospital training could have done that. It wanted nerve."

"Yes, indeed," I answered, with a shudder. "Could Miss Benson have done it?"

"No; but she does many other things. She is just as useful in her way."

Yet the interest died out of his face as he mentioned her.

"Jem," I said, as we drove home that night, "I foresee an engagement looming in the distance, at no great distance either."

"You *don't* think Featherstone will be caught

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by that angling woman?" ejaculated Jem, in a tone of disgust.

"If by that 'angling woman' you mean Miss Cruikshank, I should say decidedly not," I said, with a burst of laughter; "but if you are not clever enough to guess, I certainly shall not tell you. I want to tell you something else. I retract my former opinion of Dr. Trevor. I think he is good and very interesting to talk to. He was quite delightful to-night."

Jem gave a low whistle.

"Oh, that is what you are up to, is it? It is Dr. Trevor and who? Miss Wingfield or Miss Benson?"

"Why, Jem, you are turning into a gossip," I said sharply, "and gossip of the *worst* description. It is shameful to couple people together like that. Here we are. Help me out of the carriage. I can't move, I am so wrapped up;" and I left Jem in a fog as to whether *I* had gossiped or *he*. All the same I *do* believe that Dr. Trevor will marry Edith, and it will be a perfect arrangement. I hope I shall be at the wedding.

Nov. 2.—The concert is over, and successfully over, and I breathe freely. I was very anxious it should be successful. I have had a great deal of amusement over it, and excitement as well. It seems absurd to say that of an East End entertainment, and yet it is true. The unusualness of it all made it exciting. The whole party of us started in an omnibus from here soon after seven. I felt a perfect Cinderella in my white gown by the side of Miss Cruikshank, who was

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radiant in amber silk. She said she thought the "lower orders" liked you to be smart; but the glance she threw at Captain Featherstone made me sure that she was not altogether unmindful of the upper ten.

I was strangely excited and elated as we drew near our destination, and the misery and squalor of the streets did not depress me as greatly as they had done on my first visit to St. Chads. Nothing could show one a more dreary side of life than the sights which greeted us. Open stalls stood in the streets covered with untempting-looking viands, and lit by flaring torches. Men and women wrangled with rough gestures and rougher speech.

Lady Wylmington, who, in the absence of Aunt Annie, had consented to chaperon us all, sat in the opposite corner to myself, and I sought her hand, and held it. It gave me a sense of protection in my strange surroundings. Yet, to-night it was not the darkest side of the picture that was uppermost in my mind.

I noticed a little group of children dancing with very real enjoyment, to the strains of a barrel-organ. Even here people might be happy if they liked, and we in our humble fashion were going to try to brighten up some of these sad lives if only for an hour.

For once, Mr. Benson's mission and ours was the same. I was glad beyond measure to be able to fulfil my promise. I was in no mood for talking, so I sat back in my corner and listened to the ripple of chatter about me.

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"It is awful—simply awful!" said Miss Cruikshank, shrugging her shoulders. "I do not know that I should have dared to have come if I had realized what a terribly low set of people live down here. Do you think we are quite safe, Captain Featherstone?"

"Yes, they're quiet enough," drawled the defender of our country; "but they don't look pretty, do they?"

"Not got much to make 'em look pretty, have they?" said Jem, unexpectedly rousing himself to take up the cudgels to defend the poor East Londoner. "It is men like Benson and Trevor who will make their lives prettier. I call it downright plucky of a fellow to settle down in a hole like this."

We were nearing St. Chads. A crowd had gathered in the street outside the hall, so that we advanced only at foot's pace. When we finally drew up, Mr. Benson and his colleagues and Dr. Trevor were waiting to receive us, but Mr. Benson had not a word for any of us until his grandmother had been escorted to her seat. Then he returned with a radiant face of welcome. I never saw him so joyous in manner.

"You have carried it through," he said. "I feel the evening will be a glorious success."

"Did Dr. Trevor give a favourable report of us then?" I asked, smiling at Dr. Trevor, who stood near.

"I needed no report. I know everything will go well," retorted Mr. Benson gaily; "but come!

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Listen to the shuffling of feet. Your audience is growing impatient."

We performers were established in a little room at the back of the stage, but I slipped into a seat close to the open door, where I could see all that was going on and not be seen.

In the front row sat Lady Wylmington, and close by her side were Dorothy and Edith. Even Dorothy's quiet face was alight with animation to-night. It was the opening of the new recreation-room which her brother had so longed for, a night of no small importance perhaps to the future of St. Chads. Dorothy's eye followed Mr. Benson wherever he went. Edith, too, was happy. Her head was constantly turned to find the face of some friend in the audience. She was nodding and smiling, I thought, at half the women and children in the room. Was I wrong in thinking that her sweetest and brightest smile was reserved for Dr. Trevor? who certainly went very often to her side and lingered long there.

Mr. Benson stayed in no settled place, but moved in and out at will among his people, talking to one and another with that bright joyousness of manner that I had noticed before. For the first time I saw him in his true element. I felt instinctively that he was a living power in the place, that he was probably exercising a strong influence over many people in that audience, and that thought led me to study the faces of the hundreds that were in that room that night. They were all poor people, but many of

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them had such shrewd, clever faces, a great contrast to the poor people of Monckton.

Many here would be able to judge whether the entertainment we offered them was good, bad, or indifferent. I was very anxious to please them, and to win their approval. There were some very sad, pale faces amongst them, and I began to realize how, if one lived here, it would seem worth the struggle of a lifetime to make even one of these sad lives really happier. I was awakened from my reverie by a voice at my side, and looking round, saw Miss Cruikshank.

"You never told me how bewilderingly handsome Mr. Benson is," she said. "It is worth the journey to look at him. He is quite beautiful, you know," she added, with a giggle.

"Is he?" I answered indifferently. "Beautiful is a term I never apply to a man."

Ah, no! Mr. Benson is a man I cannot tabulate as handsome, or beautiful, or fascinating. He is extraordinary, different from any one I have ever met. He is himself.

Meanwhile, the entertainment was progressing, and the audience was well-pleased, so that I was neither nervous nor anxious when it came to my turn to sing; in fact, I felt a thrill of exultation in singing that had never been mine before. It was such a sympathetic audience. It seemed as if I were among friends.

They encored my first song, and I sang again; but later on, when I sang "Home, sweet home," the excitement was almost too much for me.

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There was a sob in my throat and an ache in my heart as I sang to these people with their interested faces, of what a home should be, and felt that possibly there was scarcely a decent home in all St. Chads. They encored that, but I was tired and silly enough to be inclined to cry, so Mr. Benson just led me back on to the stage for a moment, and then the concert was ended.

"You are over-tired," he said kindly.

"No," I answered. "I have not had a happier evening since I came to London."

"Is it true?" Mr. Benson answered, with almost a look of triumph on his face. "I suppose the happiness you have given many has reflected itself upon you. You have given me, amongst others, a perfectly happy evening."

He did not speak to me again until just as I was about to start. Then he asked me if he might come and see me to-day. Of course I said how glad we should be to see him, but his look as he bade me good-night startled me. I scarcely knew what it meant. Why is he coming? We all returned to supper at Lady Wylmington's.

"You have been very good, Jem," I said, when we at last reached home, and he was bidding me good-night. "I never could have got through without you."

"I am glad I was able to help you, Sylvia," he said simply. "That man Benson is not half the fool I thought him."

"A somewhat left-handed compliment," I said, with a laugh.

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"I thought he was the sort of fellow that would always go about with a Bible under his arm, and do nothing but bother people to go to church," continued Jem.

"I dare say that is his final object, whatever his methods may be. It is part of a clergyman's work after all, Jem."

"That's all very well, but it strikes me that Benson is a manly sort of a chap. I watched him amongst the men to-night, and they respect him and like him."

"Well, anyhow I must be off to bed. I am *dreadfully* tired," I said, with a yawn.

I did not care to let Jem see how pleased I was that he was learning to appreciate Mr. Benson at his proper worth.

Tired as I was, I could not sleep. I suppose the unusual form of my dissipation was too much for me, for I can sleep well enough after a ball. Hour after hour I lay broad awake going over and over again the events of the previous evening. I was so tired this morning that I had my breakfast upstairs, and I never saw Aunt Annie before she started to spend the day with a relation at Sydenham. I have been alone to-day, and I am not sorry to be quiet, for I am still very tired. I have given orders that I will see no one but Mr. Benson.

Nov. 3.—What a gulf separates to-day from yesterday! I have lost a friend, the very best friend I have ever had, and I am miserable, simply miserable.

Mr. Benson came yesterday just as I had finished.

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writing my diary. The moment I looked at his face I knew his mission. He had come to ask me to marry him. I can scarcely even now recall his words. One fact is appallingly clear to me. He proposed to me, and I—refused him. To-day I look at the long years that are perhaps before me, and feel that in all these years I may never see him again, that I have by my own act dismissed this friend, that I have put him to intolerable pain, the saint, the hero who saved my life at the risk of his own, and I too am miserable.

Many men have asked me to marry them, but never a man like this. He is the best, the holiest man I have ever met. I know it all now, as I look back on the last few months. With his help, I feel as if I too might have learned to climb the road to heaven, and yet I refused him.

Ah! how good and gentle he was to me, blaming himself for ever telling me that he loved me, telling me that the memory of me would help him still in his work. He put aside his own sorrow to comfort me, for I was in awful trouble. At the end he quietly took me in his arms and kissed me, and then went away without a word.

I lay on the sofa and cried till I was tired. Then I felt that no one must find me like this, so I went up-stairs, and as my head was aching badly, I sent down word to Aunt Annie when she returned that I was poorly and had gone to bed, if she would kindly excuse my non-appearance at dinner.

Late in the evening she came up to see me. My face was turned away from the door, and I did

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not move when she entered. For this one night I did so long for silence and for time to collect my thoughts, but it was not to be.

"Are you awake, dear Sylvia?" she said gently.

I would not feign sleep, so I reluctantly turned, and raised myself up on my pillows.

"I am awake, Aunt Annie, but my head is still very bad."

"Good gracious, child!" exclaimed Aunt Annie, in a voice of horror. "How red your eyes are! I believe you have caught something in that awful place last night. I shall send for the doctor."

The threat thoroughly roused me, and I sat upright and looked at her steadily.

"Don't worry yourself, Aunt Annie. I am not ill. I have been crying myself into a headache, that is all. I have caught nothing but a good man's heart. Mr. Benson came to-day when you were out, and he asked me to marry him."

I knew that I had to tell Aunt Annie some time, but perhaps it was scarcely fair to explode it upon her like this, but I was too wretched to weigh my words. She was too astonished to answer me at first.

"Mr. *Benson* asked you to marry him?" she reiterated, in a low voice. "The man must be mad."

"No," I answered, breaking into sobs, "I think I was mad, rather. I have refused him."

The relief was almost too much for Aunt Annie. She abandoned her habitual reserve. She gathered me in her arms and covered me with kisses, but her kisses did not comfort me.

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"You are a good, wise little Sylvia," she said caressingly. "Just fancy a flower like you transplanted to East London. It was preposterous, ridiculous to expect it; but don't cry, dear child, don't cry. Why do you take it so to heart?"

"Because I have hurt him, I have hurt him dreadfully, and he was so good to me. I have hurt myself too. I am miserable."

"It ought never to have come to a proposal," said Aunt Annie, resuming her usually quiet manner; "but you would not listen to me, Sylvia. You *would* throw yourself in his way, and you have to bear the consequences."

"But I did not throw myself in his way for that," I protested. "How should I foresee that he, of all men, would want to marry me? You told me once that he never meant to marry at all, and lately you said you thought it not unlikely that he would marry Edith Wingfield."

Aunt Annie looked a little taken aback.

"My dear, you are not in a fit mood to discuss the subject. You are over-tired and over-strained, and are inclined to take a thoroughly morbid view of things. I am not blaming you now. Far from it. You have acted wisely in refusing Mr. Benson, but you must forgive my thinking him wrong to propose to a child like you. Now I want you to compose yourself. You must really try to stop crying."

I was too weary to argue. The murder was out. I had concealed nothing from Aunt Annie, and she must think what she liked.

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"I never want to talk of it again, Aunt Annie. Please don't discuss it, and don't tell Jem," and I sank back on my pillows. She stroked my head and left me, but not to sleep.

To-day things do not seem a bit brighter. I shall never forgive myself. I have been wondering if I have behaved badly to Mr. Benson, if I encouraged him to think that I cared for him? But I *do* care for him. I cannot hide the truth from myself. "We needs must love the highest when we see it," and he is the best I have come across, but yet I cannot marry him. I could not share his life. I only half understand his aims. I should clog him in his work, and one day he would wake up to the truth that his idol was clay. I have thought of it till I am tired of thinking, but there is no other ending possible. I feel I have made "The Great Refusal."

Jem is puzzled and perplexed. He feels that something is wrong, but does not know what it is. He asked me to ride with him, but I told him I was not very well.

"Is it your head, Sylvia?" he asked.

"Yes, Jem," I said, but I could have more truly said that it was my heart that ached.

Later on he came in with a great bunch of Neapolitan violets, which he tossed into my lap.

"Are they for me, Jem?" I said, trying to smile.

"Yes, I thought they would do your head good. Are you better? You are not going to be ill, are you?" and he looked at me with a rather disconcerting scrutiny.

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"The violets are lovely," I said, fastening them into my dress. "I am not a bit ill. I am knocked up, nothing more. I am ever so much better now."

Jem leant with his back against the mantelpiece, and looked down upon me.

"I have been thinking that perhaps you don't want to go down to Monckton Court yet. You will be dull and bored with only mother and me. Perhaps you are dreading going back to the scene of the fire. If so, shall we all stay in London a little longer?"

I was greatly touched. I knew the poor fellow was simply longing to get down to his hunting.

"You are very good to me," I said, with tears in my eyes, "but I would not put off going to Monckton for anything. I am tired of London or myself. I shall be glad to go home."

"Then you feel our house your home?" asked Jem quickly.

"Of course. I have no other till mother comes back."

Jem's face fell, and he abruptly turned and left the room.

I spoke the truth. I shall be glad to go. Will distance take away this feeling of irreparable loss? Will it make me forget Mr. Benson's face as he stood and talked to me? Oh, that I had some kind, good woman to talk to! I have cut myself off from dear, sweet Lady Wylmington. She will never have anything more to do with me. She would far rather that I injured her than Cyril, the very light of her eyes. No; I suppose I

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have seen the last of Lady Wylmington, and I must bear my pain alone. Aunt Annie watches me with eyes so full of inquiry that they torture me.

Ten o'clock p.m.—I was put to shame for my thought of Lady Wylmington by a little note that arrived to-night. It lies before me as I write.

"DEAR CHILD,

"I understand from my grandson, who has been to see me to-day, that you are going down to Monckton Court on Saturday next. Will you come and bid me good-bye before you go? I shall be in to-morrow afternoon about four o'clock, and shall be pleased to have a quiet chat with you. I shall expect you unless I hear to the contrary. With love.

"Believe me,

"Ever yours affectionately,

"E. WYLMINGTON."

So she knows all, and does not hate me! I kissed that letter over and over again. There was healing and balm in her words. The note was worded so kindly and gently. I feel that I need absolution for the unintentional wrong I have done my best friend. I will see her to-morrow, and that will close the saddest chapter of my life. How curious it is for me to write this, I, who have always been so happy. I wonder *why* this trouble has come upon me?

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CHAPTER XII

EXTRACTS FROM LADY WYLMINGTON'S NOTE-BOOK

Nov. 4.

IT has come, then, what I have half expected and half feared from the commencement of the acquaintance. My poor boy! It has gone deep with him, and will, I fear, leave a lasting mark; nor do I think that upon Sylvia the impression will be transient.

But let me set things down in order.

For some time Cyril's mind and thoughts have been much occupied with his new recreation-hall, from which he expects great things, as is the fashion of the day. I hope and believe such a place will do good, and be a help to him in his work; but I fear he will be disappointed in some of his aspirations. These places of amusement for the poor are the device of man, excellently meant and kindly contrived; but it is from the

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ordinances of God that I look to see great results, and I am not able to put the same confidence in these outside contrivances that so many do in these days. Time will show what part they are to play in the great world problem of our days.

Sylvia came forward with her offer of a concert to inaugurate the new building, and the first of the month was fixed as the day.

All Saints' Day is to me a very solemn one, and comes year by year crowded with memories and thoughts of the one great army, the One Body of Christ, the living and departed saints who, though sundered, are yet one in their Living Head. And perhaps I never felt more fully the solemnity and wonderful comfort of that mystic unity than when seated in that crowded hall amongst those hundreds of our poorer brethren, between whom and ourselves such a strange gulf lies in this daily life, and yet who are very members incorporate of the mystical Body, little as the majority of them as yet realize this solemn truth.

Cyril was in his element amongst his poor people. The concert was a great success, and Sylvia sang charmingly, and was *the* success of the evening. I was a little startled by the expression of Cyril's face as the girl sang her second song. If ever a passionate love shone in any human eyes it did in Cyril's then. I felt sure from that moment that there would be more to follow, nor was I wrong.

He came to me yesterday, and told me. He

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had sought out Sylvia and told her of his love. She had almost, I gathered, admitted some amount of love for him, but she could not bear the thought of the life to which he is pledged.

He had not a word of blame for her: my noble boy came out nobly there. Even in the midst of all his pain—and that he suffered keenly was all too apparent—he was full of tenderness for her. He had taken her by surprise, he said. He had asked more than any delicately-nurtured girl could possibly give. He ought to have spared her the pain of having to tell him so.

"No, Cyril," I said. "Feeling as you did, you were right to speak; and unless I greatly mistake Sylvia, she will feel honoured all her life long in having won such a love as yours, even though she may not be able to return it in such measure as shall enable her to put aside all else for your sake. It may well be that she will be a better and a nobler woman all her life long for this experience. It has been a hard one for you, for you both indeed. But it may bear fruit for her which will be of inestimable value in the formation of her character."

I believe that idea comforted him a little. He had only thought of her tears and her pain hitherto. But no man more readily understands the purifying effect of trial and suffering upon the human heart than Cyril.

"Will you see her?" he asked before he left me. "I am sure it will comfort her. And you do not blame her, do you?"

He asked the question almost wistfully, with

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the old child-look in his eyes which always went to my heart.

"I do not blame her, dear boy," I answered. "She has never striven to win from you anything but approbation. She has always regarded you in the light of saint and hero, something far above her ken. It will be almost a terror to her to find how things have been with you. I am sure the thought never entered her head. In life and in spirit she must always have felt that a great gulf has divided you. Poor little Sylvia!"

"Yes, indeed," he said very tenderly, "she is not fit for such a life as mine. And I am pledged to St. Chads."

"No, I do not think she is fit. She is very young, very sensitive, and the call, so far as we may judge of such things, has not truly come to her. If it had I think she would have recognized it. You would not have her come simply out of enthusiasm for you. Apart from the love of a wife, you would wish yours to be at one with you in your work and in your life. I think Sylvia will have to change very much before she could be that."

"You do not blame her for it?" he said again.

"No, indeed. It is not given to all to serve in the same order. The Spirit divides His gifts severally as He will. I am one who holds that there is no real higher or lower in these things. All we are called upon to do is to follow where we are led, and to use the gifts bestowed upon us to the uttermost. I hold that the higher life

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can be led irrespective of place and circumstance. It *need* not be a lower choice that Sylvia made yesterday, when she declined the life of devotion she might have led with you as your wife."

His eyes lightened eagerly.

"Make her understand that," he said. "Help her to the higher life wherever it may be her lot to lead it. I must not see her again. I could not bear it. But do not let her think she has closed the door upon a life of devotion, because she cannot lead it with me!"

His voice broke as he turned away, and I did not seek to detain him even for a farewell. That he was cut to the very heart I saw only too clearly; but I think his is not a nature to be crushed by a purely personal sorrow. He will go back to his work and will work manfully, though for a time, at least, the sunshine of life will be darkened for him. I must watch that he does not overdo himself again. There is a look about him sometimes that I do not altogether like, and I am not certain that Dr. Trevor is satisfied about him, although he can find no adequate cause for uneasiness. It is plain that for this winter I must be as much as possible in London. I could not be at ease so far away as Monckton Abbey. Till Christmas at least I will remain here.

I wrote a note to-day to Sylvia asking her to come and see me. I received a verbal message to the effect that she would come, and just as it was getting dusk, and only the light of a great fire illumined my little morning-room, where I was

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sitting, I heard her light footfall on the stairs. The next minute she had entered alone and unannounced, and running across the room with hasty, uncertain steps, she flung herself on her knees at my feet, buried her face in my lap, and burst into a passion of tears.

I was hardly surprised at this. I knew how deeply she revered and admired Cyril, and to a sensitive nature like hers the shock of having refused his proffer of love must be very great. I could see she had been through an agony of remorse and repentance since; and her first words were characteristic of her attitude of mind.

"He has told you, I know. Oh, does he hate and abhor me? Oh, how could I do it? How could I do it? Oh, Lady Wylmington, how can you bear to have me near you!"

I let her cry for awhile, gasping out from time to time phrases such as these, which I only answered by a few caressing words. She grew quieter presently, and lay very still, with her face still hidden in my lap. Her next words were spoken much more calmly. Her sobs had ceased and her tears were dry.

"You are not angry with me then, Lady Wylmington? I thought you would never bear to see me again!"

"Angry because you have given a truthful answer to Cyril? Surely that would be very unreasonable. No, Sylvia, the truth is always best and kindest in these things, even though it may be very hard to speak at the time. Had you let

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yourself be carried away by a wave of passing emotion, and had you promised something which later on you might find it impossible to fulfil, then those who love Cyril might have had cause for deep grief and perhaps some reprobation. But you have been saved from that. Deeply as you revere Cyril, greatly as you respect him for his life's work, you know that more is wanted before you could put your hand in his and go with him whithersoever he may lead you. You do not love him enough for that, and you were brave and right to tell him so."

She lifted her face then, and looked at me with strangely pathetic eyes.

"Do I not love him enough for that? Oh, Lady Wylmington, that is just what I do not know. I cannot tell. I did not think I did when he put it all before me then. But since he has gone I have been utterly miserable. I have been saying over and over again that I have made an awful mistake, wondering if, after all, I do not love him all the time! Oh, suppose I find I do, when it is too late!"

"My dear," I answered, taking her hands in mine, "the very fact that you are tormenting yourself with questions about this is in itself an answer. When real love comes to us, we have no need to probe into our hearts in search of it. It comes upon us like a great flood, sweeping down all barriers, and bearing us away on a mighty tide which there is no stemming. If our love is true love, then we can place our hands fearlessly in the

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one held out, without a question or a doubt; and we can go to the wilds of Siberia, to a dungeon, to death itself, and feel no fear, no shrinking, for ourselves. It is life to be with him, outward circumstances are nothing. That is what love is. And I do not think, my child, that such a love has come to you as yet. You would not mistake it if it had."

She looked full at me, her lips parted, her eyes filled with a great wonder and awe.

"I—I—do not think I could love, like that!" she said softly. "It sounds too big for me."

"Only a love like that would help you to be what Cyril would want in you if you were his wife," I answered. "With him it must be all, or nothing. You know that yourself, I think. It is not the enthusiasm of a moment, the desire to spare him pain, the magnetic influence of a strong individuality acting upon your spirit, which must prompt your decision. If you can pause, hesitate, shrink back, that is enough. It is better to face the truth at once, as you have done, than to strive to work yourself up to a decision which is against the grain, and which might lead to the bitterest pain on both sides later on."

She laid down her head again for awhile, and we were silent; and then she spoke with a sadness and self-reproach which was something new in my experience of her.

"You understand me so well, Lady Wylmington, you know how unstable I am. I sometimes think there are two of me, one part striving after better

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and higher things, and the other after frivolous pleasure-seeking and vanity. And sometimes the one side gets the upper hand and sometimes the other. How can I tell which is really I? You are quite right in what you imply. If I had said 'Yes' to Cyril, I know that I should be going through awful moments of horror and fear at what lay before me; just as, having said 'No,' I feel as though I had shut the door upon my good angel, and had made a terrible retrogression."

"No, Sylvia, that must not be. You have spoken the truth, and have done right in so doing. You would have been in a more perilous position had you let yourself be carried away by strong emotion, and given an answer not truly in accordance with the dictates of your heart and reason."

"Ah, but then I should have had Cyril to help me," she cried, lifting her face and looking at me with burning eyes; "you don't know what his help is like to me, Lady Wylmington, how he lifts me —so often at least—into another life as it were. It was a sermon of his that first touched my heart, I think. I never heard a man speak as he did. And at Monckton in the spring when he took part of the service, even if it was only reading the lessons—oh, I felt what power and life he gave them. I felt as though I would walk miles to any church to hear him officiate. He lifts one out of oneself, if you know what I mean. It is such a wonderful help. He is like nobody else. He would help me always to be good!"

Poor child! What was I to answer her? He

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ideas all in confusion, her mind in a chaos of conflicting emotions. I think my next act and question startled her by its utter irrelevance, for I lifted her hand and laid my finger upon a simple little ring she wore on one of hers.

"You always wear that ring, Sylvia; was it not the gift of your mother? I think you told me so once."

"Yes," she answered wonderingly, "she gave it me before she went away to India. I always wear it—always."

"What do you think is its value?" I asked.

A little flush came into her pale cheek.

"I have never thought about that," she answered quickly; "it is my mother's gift."

I put my hand on her head and caressed her soft hair.

"Good child," I said, "that is what I wanted to hear you say. You do not appraise the gold at so much value, the pearls at so much more. To you it is 'your mother's gift'; and that is enough."

"Quite enough."

"And if from time to time during her absence your mother were to send you messages from herself, sometimes by one messenger, sometimes by another, and some gave that message eloquently and poetically, and some haltingly and lamely, would you mind very much how it was delivered, so long as you knew it came from her, and spoke of her love and care for you? Would you turn away in disgust from one messenger and say, 'No,

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thank you, I will not listen; you speak so lamely,' and only listen to the one who happens to have the silver tongue?"

Her eyes were fixed earnestly on my face.

"Lady Wylmington, what do you mean?" she asked; "you are going to teach me something. What is it?"

"Only this, Sylvia, that we are always in very great danger when we pin, as it were, our faith to individuals, when we look to be raised and uplifted by individual men, rather than by the ordinances of God of which these men are a part. Can you understand the distinction? God has set men in His Church to teach and direct us; but they are only messengers and ministers of His word and His Sacraments; we must look beyond them to the Master they serve. We must beware of the tendency to forget the Sender of the message, and to appraise the messenger at *his* individual worth —so much education, so much eloquence, so much impressive delivery, so much originality of thought; and say 'This man I will hear; but that I will not,' ignoring the fact that both (if they are men truly in their office) are set in their place by God, and that the Spirit may be speaking equally by both. Sylvia, my child, your peril is to lose sight of God in His messenger. To think of the man rather than of the message. To appraise the ring at its intrinsic worth, not to see in it only the gift of one who loves you. My child, the higher life will never be led by any of us in the strength drawn from any individual man, however noble or spotless

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or devoted his life may be. You think now that you could lead it by Cyril's side, and nowhere else. That is not so, and never ought to be. If you were to become his wife trusting in that power, you would fail grievously and disappoint him bitterly. Child, child, cannot you see for yourself how futile are strivings made in such a spirit? Believe me, you may lead as noble and devoted a life as the wife of any good man whom you can sincerely love, as with Cyril at St. Chads. It is Cyril's great wish that you shall do this, and a false step taken in what seems a good cause will not be a stepping-stone towards it. Learn to lead the higher life without Cyril, my dear. That is, I think, what you are called upon to do. You will have to look higher than to Cyril now; and in so doing you will raise yourself to a level you have not attained to before."

I think she understood. There was comprehension in her eyes, though it was mingled with sadness and a certain shrinking too. Hers is a nature that is all too prone to lean upon another, and her quick enthusiasm for what is noble and high tends in her towards too much dependence on those about her in whom she sees qualities which awaken her admiration. This has all along been the peril to her in her intercourse with Cyril. It is not good for frail human creatures to feel quite such trust and veneration in each other.

She had still another trouble on her mind. She looked up again with very wistful eyes.

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"I think you may be right. It is hard to understand how one *can* learn to stand alone——"

"Not alone, my dear, that would be indeed too hard."

"No, I should not have said alone; but you know what I mean—it seems to me like being almost left alone. I am not good like you. I cannot look over and through and beyond all the helps, and I feel so lost and desolate at home, where nobody understands or cares. But it wasn't that I meant to talk about. It was something Cyril said. He said—I can't tell if it was true, I can scarcely believe it, but he said it—that my song, my singing to his people, seemed to touch their hearts as he could not always touch them. Does it sound horrid of me to say it? but indeed it was his thought, not mine. I can't remember all he said, I was in such terror and confusion; but he seemed to be saying that I could do so much good amongst his people if only I would go amongst them too. And suppose I am shutting the door upon myself and turning back upon a call! Oh, Lady Wylmington, I am so miserable and perplexed. But he did say that, he really did, about my song."

"I know, dear; he said something like that to me."

"Did he? Oh, I am glad; you will know I did not make it up. Do you think—oh, do you think I really could help him?"

She was desperately in earnest, literally rent in pieces by conflicting emotions. Her sensitive

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spirit had had almost more than it could bear. I could have wished that Cyril's lover's ardour had spared her this farther trial. The only thing was to speak very plainly and frankly to her.

"If you are to have power to help Cyril, Sylvia, you must be a very different Sylvia from what you are now. We must learn ourselves before we can teach, and it is not given to all to be teachers; it may not be your gift at any time. At least in the present, dear child, I think you must know how helpless you would be brought face to face with——"

"Oh indeed, indeed I should. I know I am not fit. It was only what Cyril said about my song."

"My dear, Cyril is a man very deeply in love, and your singing stirred him to the very heart. It touched other hearts than his, as I plainly saw, and he was carried away by his love and ardent imaginings to a comparison he should not have made. Your sweet singing appealed powerfully to the emotions of many present, and drew tears from many eyes. It is often good for people to be so moved, but the impression very seldom lasts. You go to them from motives of kindliness and good-will, and sing them a pathetic song; but Cyril goes amongst them as God's ordinance, with God's message. To compare these two things is an impossibility. Any impression made by you upon their emotions is nothing but a house built upon the sand. Cyril may be far, far longer laying his foundations—so long that perhaps he almost despairs of seeing the structure raised—but he is building upon the rock. His message is not

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addressed simply to the transient emotions of men, but to their will, their convictions, their imaginations, their affections. The fourfold nature of man must be conquered by the power of the truth, and Cyril has weapons to do this, and he will do it worthily and well."

"Ah, will he not!" cried the girl, with eager enthusiasm. "Oh, Lady Wylmington, I know you are right, about me. I could not really help others to be good, when I am so faulty, so weak, so unstable myself. It was beautiful of Cyril to think I could; but oh, he thinks so much too well of me! If only I could learn to be what he thinks I am!"

"At least you can try, and you can aim higher than that, Sylvia. And now I think we have talked enough about this. I am glad you have been able to speak so freely. It is a great joy to us as we grow old to feel that the young can trust and confide in us. I am very grateful to you, my dear, for letting me so entirely into your confidence."

Her kiss was very sweet and ardent, as she thanked me for "letting her talk to me." She was much calmer now, and before she left I think she was somewhat comforted. It may yet be possible that those two will grow together—that she will (not with the smallest idea of such a thing) so grow and develop spiritually as to be in time able to join her life to his, but it is far better that no such idea should enter her head now. I am sure it has not. She believes that chapter of her

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life closed for ever. If she grows, it will be with a far nobler motive than the mere idea of pleasing or satisfying him. She is going back to Monckton Court for the winter, and there will be no chance of encounters between them. I believe a lasting impression has been produced upon her, and it may prove a turning-point in her life, and be the means at some future time of uniting them. But it is far better that at present neither should entertain such an idea. I shall miss the child when she goes. She has become very dear to me. Yet I am glad she should go. At Monckton she will have time to think.

Dec. 15.—I have been to St. Chads and have achieved a small triumph there, inasmuch as I have received a promise from Edith and Dorothy, from Dr. Trevor, and from all the Brotherhood, to dine with me on Christmas Day after the Evensong and carol-singing in the church. All their heavy work incident to the season will then be done, and for that evening they will feel free to leave their charges, unless there should be any very critical case of illness. At present the amount of sickness there is not great; Dr. Trevor's strenuous efforts at sanitation and the prompt care bestowed upon the sick when first taken ill tending greatly to this decrease, as does the clever nursing of Edith, and the equally skilled cookery of Dorothy. There is a pervading air of cheeriness and success permeating both the Rectory-house and the homely lodgings in Filey Street. For the time during which Cyril and his assistants have been at work the results

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are encouraging. Two of the lowest public-houses in the parish have been closed and done away with, and one den of gambling and vice has been condemned and pulled down, a pleasant-looking coffee-tavern now occupying the site.

The Brotherhood are all well, and in good spirits. The preparations for Christmas-making in poor homes is going on with great ardour. My contribution is a monster Christmas-tree for the children and old folks, to be unveiled in the recreation-hall on Christmas Eve. I took down the first instalment of presents to-day. But there will be a great many additions, I can see. Cyril is giving dinners on a large scale, but has (wisely, I think) decided that they shall all be eaten at home. There will be various entertainments and lectures in the hall after Christmas, during the short holiday spell, suited to the various capacities of men, women, and children; but on Christmas Day itself there will be nothing beyond the church services, followed at five o'clock Evensong by some carols sung by the choir. Cyril is taking great pains with his choir, and St. Chads is winning a reputation amongst surrounding districts.

And what of Cyril himself? It is not quite easy to answer this question. He bears visible traces of his recent wound, but he seldom alludes to it, even when we are talking most intimately; and he is as ardent and enthusiastic as ever over his work, and has not lost heart one whit. He is thin, thinner I think than he used to be, but he does not look or seem ill. Even Dorothy appears to

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feel no anxiety about him, and secretly rejoices that he has escaped the peril of a marriage with Sylvia. Her feelings about it all are very mixed. She is too keen-sighted not to be well aware that something has passed between them; and whilst furious with Sylvia for daring to refuse such a man as Cyril, is ardently thankful that he has escaped "the snare of the syren," as she called it one day. If ever Cyril should marry, I fear his wife will not find a friend in Dorothy.

Dec. 26.—My little dinner-party yesterday went off very happily, an unexpected excitement being caused by the announcement of an engagement between Edith and Dr. Trevor. It seems he has been in love with her almost from the beginning of the acquaintance, but has been holding himself off from any declaration, fearing to interfere with her work, and by no means sure that she would be willing to merge that in a life with him, even though she might for a time at least combine the office of doctor's wife and parish nurse.

But finding he could not keep silence indefinitely, it seems that he made a sudden dash down into Somersetshire last week, and obtained Mr. Wingfield's consent to pay his addresses to Edith. (Dr. Trevor is a man of some private means, and has expectations of a very fair income later on.) He returned shortly before the Christmas festivities commenced, and, it seemed, actually proposed to Edith during the entertainment of the Christmas-tree the previous evening.

I thought Edith looked very blooming and happy

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when she appeared, but the reason only came out in the course of the evening. The engagement is to be for a year—that was the father's stipulation, as he did not think the young people knew enough of each other to enter into the bonds of matrimony more quickly. Both appear quite content with this reservation. Edith has no wish to abandon her work sooner, the lovers will have constant chances of meeting, and it will give Cyril plenty of time to decide how to replace Edith, and to find another companion for Dorothy, if indeed he may not set on foot the larger scheme we have spoken of respecting lay-helpers amongst the women.

I had only one opportunity of asking him what he thought of it and how it would affect him personally, and his answer was characteristic if not entirely satisfactory—

"I am delighted for Trevor to find so good a wife. They love one another without any qualification or after-thought. It will be a true union of souls. As for our loss in Miss Wingfield—well, we must face that later on when the need comes. At present I seem to have lost the power of looking forward. I just go on from day to day doing the next thing. I find that is the only thing to do. I can bear it so, but it is wiser not to forecast the future."

My poor Cyril! That was not the way in which he used to speak.

March 15.—There has been singularly little to record this winter. I have remained all the time

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in Park Lane, and have visited St. Chads almost weekly. The weather after Christmas became severe. Some strikes caused widespread distress, the people of this district being deprived of work through no fault of their own. Cyril was of course in the forefront of the battle, and the Brotherhood gallantly supported him. Sylvia sent me many little contributions, with a shy petition that they might be used for the poor of St. Chads, without Cyril's being told from whence they came. And yet I think he guessed when I placed the little packets in his hand and said a friend had sent them. He flushed from brow to chin, and turned away that I might not see his face. No, he has not forgotten. I think he will never forget.

She has not forgotten either. Her letters breathe a spirit of gentle humility and sweetness which is very touching. I can tell by the way she asks me for advice, for guidance in her studies, for counsel in her little perplexities, that she is truly striving after a higher walk in life. She tells me too that her cousin Jem is her "great comfort now." He seems to have been thoroughly awakened by something, and to be playing a very generous and manly part by the girl he loves, yet whose heart is more another's than his. It seems he has a great admiration for Cyril, awakened by his heroism at the fire and developed by chance meetings since. Perhaps when I go down I shall see how things are tending. I must return to the Abbey for a short time. I cannot leave affairs there longer. I should like to have stayed over Easter, for my boy

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begins to look very worn and wan, and the strain of Holy Week is always very great to one of his calibre. Dr. Trevor is vaguely uneasy about him, but cannot give a reason for it. What I have settled is that when the Carews leave the Court, which I hear they will do immediately after Easter, Cyril shall come to me again, as he did last year. He has almost promised this, and I think the Brotherhood will keep him up to it. They are not satisfied about him, yet can give no reason for it.

Dorothy vehemently asserts that there is nothing wrong, that he only wants a little rest, and that she will bring him to me after Easter, "when Sylvia is out of the way."

I trust she may be right, but her very vehemence sometimes makes me uneasy. Why should the subject excite her if she had not some lingering fear that all was not well, although determined not to face and analyze the misgiving? But perhaps I am tormenting myself needlessly. These are things not in our own hands. In that must be our rest and comfort.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE CRUSADE

IT was a bitter battle that Cyril Benson had to fight through the winter that followed his proposal to Sylvia O'Connor. He had fondly believed that with her rejection of his offer the vision that had so long haunted him would fade away, and this certainly was better for his life and character than a useless hankering after the impossible.

After that one talk with Lady Wylmington, when he had laid his whole soul bare before her, he never willingly allowed Sylvia's name to pass his lips. His was a sorrow that refused to be crushed out, but in time it might be lived down, he thought. He would not take it out and look at it with a lingering sentimental regret. He told himself that he was married to his work, and, judging by the ardour and enthusiasm he threw into it, he

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had chosen a wife that demanded all his time and energies.

With eyes quickened by his own experience, he watched the growing attachment between Dr. Trevor and Miss Wingfield, so that it was no astonishment to him, but a very great joy, when their engagement was announced on Christmas Day.

"I am disappointed in my heart of hearts," said Dorothy, as she talked the matter over with her brother. "I shall never say so to anybody but you, but I thought Edith was the kind of girl to devote herself to her work."

"So she has done," answered Cyril, a little shortly. "Few women have worked harder, and now another form of work presents itself, and she accepts it as simply as she accepted the first. She is utterly single-minded, and I have never seen two people better suited to each other than Trevor and Miss Wingfield. Her sweet, gentle manner will subdue his bluntness, and his strong judgment will temper her enthusiasm."

Dorothy sighed.

"I have the deepest affection for Edith, but I wish she had not got engaged quite so soon. You must find some one else to work with me, Cyril. I want always to stay near you."

Cyril stooped and kissed her.

"All in good time, my over-anxious little sister. Trevor is to wait for a year, and by that time a fresh scheme of work may be developed;" and with that hope Dorothy had to content herself.

It was a great relief to Cyril that all through

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the winter he had his grandmother to refer to in any matter that interested or perplexed him. She stayed in London as long as she possibly could, but about the middle of March her presence was imperatively demanded at Monckton. Cyril dined with her the evening before she started.

"You will write to me every week, Cyril?" said Lady Wylmington, a little anxiously. "I am not sure that you are not working yourself too hard again."

"Not a bit of it," Cyril answered, with a smile. "Of course I shall write every week, my more than mother. I shall miss you sadly. I have never had you near me for a whole winter before. In April or May I shall hope to come and see you."

It stirred Cyril strangely that his grandmother would so soon be meeting Sylvia again, but although the thought was in both of their minds no utterance was given to it by either when they bade each other farewell.

"Benson, I want to consult you about something," said Dr. Trevor one day, soon after Lady Wylmington's departure. "Have you a few minutes to spare?"

"Certainly," said Cyril, pushing back his chair from his writing-table, and poking up the dying embers of the fire. "I am trying to write out notes for my Sunday's sermon, but I am pumped dry. I have no ideas left."

"Tired out, rather," said Dr. Trevor, seating himself. "I badly want your advice. It may do you good to turn your thoughts into a new channel."

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"Very well. Go ahead. What is amiss?" asked Cyril, throwing himself back into his easy-chair.

"Martin is ill, and I can do nothing for him. I fancy you might help him, if you could contrive to get at him."

Cyril broke into a whistle. Martin was the Dissenter who had opposed his work more bitterly than any one else since he had come to St. Chads. He was the leading light of one of the Dissenting chapels, an argumentative and belligerent deacon, who lost no opportunity of doing the Church an ill-turn.

"Why am I likely to succeed where you fail?" asked Cyril, after a moment's pause.

"I think the man's illness is more of mind than body. Something is really preying upon him seriously, and it is no case for tonics."

"You think if I could bring him to confession it might be good for his soul?" inquired Cyril, with a rather humorous smile. "My dear fellow, I don't suppose he would allow me inside his doors. How was it that you were called in?"

"His wife came to see me one evening in tears, said her husband could neither sleep nor eat, that she was quite certain he was sickening for some illness, and asked me if I could manage to call in without mentioning that she had been to see me. I met him in the street happily, got into conversation, and told him that I thought he did not look well. Then he said that he should be glad if I could give him anything to quiet his nerves. He

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was restless, and could not sleep. I have been attending him for three weeks, and can do nothing for him. I tell you the man is unhappy about something. The case is more yours than mine."

"Why, Martin looks upon me as a benighted Papist. He crosses to the other side of the street to avoid a meeting," said Cyril, a little hotly. "Yet there is something about the fellow that I rather like, if I could get at him, but under our present strained relations I do not see how the thing is possible."

"I still maintain that if he knew you as you are, you are the man that might help him," said Dr. Trevor doggedly.

Cyril broke into the sunniest of smiles.

"All right, old man. I will have a try, as you are so set upon it, but failure is a foregone conclusion. Still, I am grateful to you for telling me of the trouble of any parishioner."

A few days afterwards Cyril was coming home from a long round of visiting, when he noticed the weary, dispirited form of a man walking on in front. The shoulders were bent, the head was thrown forward, and he was talking rapidly to himself as he walked.

In the gathering gloom of the March afternoon Cyril recognized that the man was Martin. He quickened his pace and joined him.

"Good evening, Mr. Martin," he said, lifting his hat; "you are the very person I wanted to see. I wonder if you could spare me a minute or two to

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talk over a matter that I believe is of interest to us both."

Mr. Martin lifted startled eyes to the speaker's face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I did not recognize you in the half-light. I don't think I can come in now. There is a lot of work before me when I get home, and my wife will be expecting me back to tea;" but Cyril saw by the man's manner that his hesitation was due rather to the fact that he did not know what topic was to be discussed.

"If you had a cup of tea with me," he said courteously, "you would not be losing time, and talking takes less time than writing. It is about Climpson that I want to consult you. I believe you often employ him."

Mr. Martin hesitated. Mr. Benson had used the word "consult," so after all there might be nothing to fear from the interview. The two men had walked on side by side and were standing in front of the clergy-house, and before he quite knew what had happened Mr. Martin found himself in the brightly-lit library. Cyril crossed the room, rang the bell and ordered tea, drew up his easy-chair towards the fire, and placed his visitor in it. Mr. Martin sat uneasily on the edge of it, and spread out his hands to the friendly blaze. As the fire-light flickered upon his face Cyril was shocked to see how exceedingly ill the man looked.

"Now about Climpson," began Cyril as he handed the visitor his tea. "The man is desper-

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ately ill, and won't do a day's work for weeks to come. He belongs to no club (which if he ever lives to get well must be amended), but our present care is to help him over this time of trouble. He calls himself a Churchman; his wife and children I think attend your chapel, and she told me to-day that she had applied to you as treasurer of the funds to lay her case before your committee. I know that you are often very liberal in cases of distress, but I did not feel sure that you would consider this a proper case for relief, and so I told the woman; but as I know that our resources have been heavily taxed throughout the winter, I should be grateful if you would tell me what answer she is likely to get. If we on our side know what help the family is receiving, we can regulate our alms-giving accordingly."

"As a matter of fact, sir, we have refused the woman's application. I think each religious denomination should be able to provide for the needs of the sick people belonging to it, and we have to confine our charities to our own flock."

"Ah," ejaculated Cyril, "I am glad to say we don't. We consider that every one who is in sorrow has a right to our sympathy and help, whether they belong to our branch of the Church universal or not."

"I dare say you State-paid clergy can afford to be more generous than we can," said Mr. Martin with a suspicion of sarcasm in his tone.

Cyril smiled good-humouredly. "I almost wonder that a man as well educated as yourself

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should support the fiction of a State-paid Church, Mr. Martin, but I have no intention of arguing the matter just at present. I am much obliged to you for telling me exactly about Climpson, for now we shall know how to act. Before we part I wish we could agree to be better friends for the future. It is painful to think that you and I, who equally profess to serve the same Master, are scarcely on speaking terms."

"You are quite mistaken if you think I have any personal dislike to you, Mr. Benson," said Mr. Martin, a little pompously, "but I have felt it my duty, my bounden duty, to try and prove the fallacy of the doctrine you teach. Your sacramental teaching, for instance, has a directly Roman tendency, your——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Cyril with a smile, "on individual points of doctrine we must agree to differ. What I am pleading for is our mutual bond of union, as fellow soldiers under the same Captain, sworn to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Surely we can each try in our own way to fight these great enemies without making our differences on points of detail a personal quarrel. You have been hard on me once or twice, Mr. Martin, and attributed motives to me of which I was innocent. I want you in future to believe that though you may consider me mistaken, I have at least a sincere desire to be as earnest and as honest as yourself."

"Well, I dare say I have been carried away at times into saying sharper things than I quite

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meant," said Mr. Martin. "If so, I can only say that I will try to be more careful in time to come."

"Thank you," said Cyril heartily, stretching out his hand. "I have long wished to establish more friendly personal relations. By the way, I have not seen you for a long time, and I do not think you are looking well. I hope there is nothing the matter."

Mr. Martin had accepted the proffered hand, but his eyes fell before Cyril's kindly gaze.

"No, I have not been well for some time past, but the doctor does not seem able to do much for me. I suppose it is overwork or over-anxiety. The strikes affect my building trade a great deal. I am only in quite a small way, and times are bad, times are bad! I hear you always side with the men, sir?"

"I hope I try to side with the right," said Cyril gently. "I dare say I make lots of mistakes, but I am truly sorry you are in trouble. I don't suppose I could be of any use to a business man like yourself, but, if I could, will you remember that it would give me great pleasure at any time if you cared to come and see me, or sent for me to see you?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Martin, rising to go. He turned as he reached the door, a hesitating look on his face.

"I have more than half a mind to tell you what it is that is troubling me," he said. "You have spoken words to me to-night that make me feel as if I could trust you."

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The two men stood facing each other. Cyril saw that Mr. Martin was speaking under the influence of strong excitement.

"Had you better tell me anything until you have thought the matter over?" he said kindly. "I am almost a stranger to you, but if you choose to ask my advice, I will give you the best I can."

"I am in sore need of a friend," said Mr. Martin, almost in a whisper, "and I have never a friend to turn to."

Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Sit down then and tell me what is on your mind," said Cyril simply. "I will help you if I can."

"Well, if I tell the truth, affairs are not going just right between me and the other chapel members."

"I am afraid," Cyril answered, "my experience will not help you much, for I know nothing of your form of Church management."

"It is a matter of business, sir, that troubles me. I am treasurer for the chapel funds; they are to be audited on Lady Day, and there is a deficit. Bills that ought to be paid are still unsettled, and rumours of these things have reached the other deacons, and there is to be an inquiry into my accounts."

"But the worst that can happen is, that you, in common with the rest of the committee, will have to make the deficit good; but no blame can attach to you if your accounts will bear inspection."

A groan broke from Mr. Martin's lips.

"That is where the rub comes! That is the

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ill no doctor can cure! I am a hundred pounds to the bad, and in ten days everybody will know it. I have used the money, and I have not a hundred pence to replace it with. They can put me in prison if they like. Anyhow I am a ruined and disgraced man."

There was a moment's pause. A coal fell from the fire on to the hearth with a noisy crash, and Cyril stooped to replace it.

"What *induced* you to do such a thing?" he asked quietly.

"Before God, sir, I had no intention of being dishonest, although now I feel myself in the position of a common thief. I shivered just now when you used the word honest in connection with my name. I'll tell you just how it happened. Last December I was finishing a contract for altering a shop; I had a sudden pressing call upon me for a hundred pounds to finish the work, pay my men, etc. I had no ready money, but by the terms of the contract I was to be paid the two hundred pounds that was owed me before the end of the year. There was the hundred I needed in the chapel funds, and I asked nobody's leave, but I borrowed it. Remember the two hundred was fairly owed me, and I had not the least reason to doubt the soundness of the firm for which I was working. A week later the firm went bankrupt, and I am lucky if I get a shilling in the pound."

"Poor fellow," said Cyril. "You made a grievous mistake in using money that was not

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your own, even although you believed you could replace it in a few days. Can't you put yourself in the hands of your committee, and tell them as frankly as you have told me what has occurred?"

"Tell them that I am a thief, in fact," said his companion gloomily, "for there is not one of them that would not think it."

"Why should they doubt your story more than I do?" said Cyril.

"Then you believe that I never meant to be dishonest?" said Mr. Martin eagerly.

"Yes, I quite believe it, and so will they if you tell them the truth. You will repay if they give you time."

"Think what my position will be after it! I shall be an object of suspicion; my wife and children will be looked down upon, and I shall lose some of my best clients. My business lies among the chapel folk."

"That seems to me the simplest and straightest course; but if you cannot see your way to it, then I must lend you the hundred pounds."

"You!" cried Mr. Martin, in a voice husky with emotion. "Why should *you* do me this great kindness?"

"Because you are in trouble, and seem to have no one else to turn to."

Then the poor fellow hid his face in his hands, and Cyril saw the tears forcing their way through his fingers.

"If you knew the misery I have endured for the last few months, sir! I have felt as if the devil had

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me in his power, and I have been afraid to look my fellow-men in the face. You have saved me from ruin of body and soul alike. I can never tell you how grateful I am."

"You need not thank me. You will want the money at once. I had better not give you a cheque—it might lead to unpleasantness. If you call upon me at this time to-morrow the money shall be ready for you. Meantime you can collect the bills that need payment, and have everything fair and square before your accounts are audited."

"This is the first time I have done a crooked thing in all my business career, and, please God, it shall be the last. I will bring an I. O. U. with me, and I will repay you in six months' time with five per cent. interest."

"I don't wish for any note of hand from you, or any writing on the matter. It rests solely between you and me. I do not lend money upon interest, and I think six months may hamper you. If you return it in the next year I shall be satisfied."

"And you are willing to lend me this hundred pounds on the strength of my promise to return it, without one word to show that I owe it to you?" gasped Mr. Martin.

"Perfectly willing, for I think you will return it."

"That I will, if I keep my health and brains—so help me God," said Mr. Martin solemnly. "You have taught me a lesson to-night I shall not soon forget. You have given me the only absolution that I believe one man can confer upon another.

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You have shown me that you still think me worthy of trust; you have given me back some measure of self-respect."

"Then you will call again to-morrow?" said Cyril, anxious to bring the painful interview to a conclusion.

The next day Mr. Martin called for the money, and there Cyril thought the matter was ended; but a few days later Mr. Martin came again, asking for a few minutes' quiet conversation.

"I wanted to tell you that the accounts have been audited and found correct," said Mr. Martin; "and then one of the deacons said he was afraid I had been made uncomfortable by some gossip that had been set about as to my not having paid the bills correctly, and he begged to apologize in the name of the committee, and to say they were all satisfied with the way I had managed the funds."

"What did you say?" inquired Cyril.

"I stood up before them all," answered Mr. Martin, who was grey with emotion, "and I told them the story of my temptation, just as I told it you, only of course I kept back your name, sir; and at the end I asked them to accept my resignation, both as deacon and treasurer, for I felt I had forfeited my right to both." Mr. Martin paused. "Would you believe it?—there was not a man there who did not shake me by the hand, and say that he wished things to go on as they had done before; but to that I did not consent. I am simply a chapel member now, holding no office or

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distinction. I shall never forget that it is to you I owe the fact that I can look my fellows in the face with no feeling of shame."

"It has been worth much to me," answered Cyril kindly, "for it has made us friends;" and with a warm shake of the hand the two men parted. Dr. Trevor came in a few minutes after Mr. Martin had left.

"I have made friends with Martin at last, Trevor," said Cyril with a happy laugh, "and I ought to thank you for it. He has been in trouble, but a way has been found out of his difficulties, and I think now he will get better." And that was all that was said on the subject.

Cyril felt very bright and happy that March evening as he buttoned up his coat and prepared to start out for his night-school. Martin had been a constant thorn in the flesh, and to one so strong in his religious convictions, so earnest to bring others to be true living members of the Church as Cyril, the petty border warfare with Martin had been a wearying source of irritation, and now that was a thing of the past. His only personal enemy was his declared friend. Cyril thanked God in his heart and took courage.

The night was very wet; the street lamps reflected their flickering light in the pools that collected on the pavement; not a soul was abroad that could find shelter, but Cyril hurried on regardless of the rain that was blown pitilessly into his face. Rapidly turning a street corner he was puzzled to see a group of big lads collected in the

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middle of the road, evidently absorbed with interest by some object in the centre of the circle. Cyril pushed his way to the outside of the circle, and there, seated on the ground in the middle, was a little girl weeping bitterly, clasping to her breast a miserable mewing cat.

"Hand it over, little 'un," cried one of the biggest lads. "We won't do you no harm if you give us the cat to 'ave a bit of fun with. If you don't give it up quiet, we'll make you."

"It's mine—it's mine," screamed the girl, springing to her feet. "I'll never give it you—never!"

"Take that, then," cried a lad of about sixteen, standing in the outer circle, and a sharp stone aimed at the cat caught the girl on her forehead, and she fell to the ground.

At the same moment the boy who had thrown it found himself struggling in a strong man's arms.

"You cowardly brute, to dare to attack a defenceless child," Cyril shouted; and without waiting to think what he did, he gave the lad a sound thrashing with the stick that he held in his hand. Then, with a gesture of contempt, he pushed him from him.

"If harm comes of this," he said, pointing to the child in the road, "I know your name and where to find you. At present you may go."

The rest of the boys had dispersed quickly, not caring to be mixed up in a business which looked as if it might end badly.

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Cyril stooped over the child, who still lay unconscious. The cat was clasped tightly in her arms, and was mewing pitifully. With infinite tenderness Cyril lifted the child and her burden. The nearest place of shelter was Filey Street. He knew that both would be looked after there, and he tried with his overcoat to shelter his poor little charge from the pitiless rain. She was already soaked to the skin. As he carried her she opened her eyes.

"My head hurts," she moaned.

"Yes," said Cyril. "I am taking you and pussy to some kind ladies who live close here. Don't talk now. You are a brave little maid."

Suddenly as he walked along he became conscious in his turn of an overpowering giddiness, of an uncertainty in his gait.

"I can't be going to faint," he thought. He reached the door of Dorothy's and Edith's lodgings and rang the bell.

"Send my sister to me," he said, supporting himself against the door-post.

At the sound of his voice, Dorothy and Edith ran into the passage.

"Cyril! what is the matter?" cried Dorothy, aghast at her brother's deathly whiteness.

"Look after the child," he said, putting her into Dorothy's arms, and the next moment he had fallen unconscious on the floor of the passage.

There are supreme moments of agony in every woman's life. Such a moment was Dorothy's as she saw Cyril lying in helpless unconsciousness on

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the floor. She was certain that it was no ordinary fainting fit. It was a precursor of she knew not what. Yet a curious calmness had possession of her, nor did she for one moment lose self-control. The child in her arms had recovered consciousness, and was whimpering sadly.

"Carry her to Mrs. Hewitt, Edith. I must see to Cyril."

Edith obeyed quietly and quickly. When she returned she found Dorothy kneeling on the floor by her brother, chafing his hands, loosening his collar, and trying to pour brandy down his throat.

"I wish Dr. Trevor were here," she said, lifting her colourless face. "It is not fainting, Edith; it is worse than that."

"I will go and bring him back with me," said Edith quickly. "We can't move Mr. Benson, but we can make him more comfortable," and she hurriedly brought cushions and rugs from the sitting-room. Five minutes later she was speeding down the street with winged feet.

It seemed hours to Dorothy, as she knelt by her brother, before she heard Edith's latchkey turning in the lock. In reality it was barely half-an-hour.

Dr. Trevor's face was full of deep concern. Without a word he took Dorothy's place, and felt Cyril's pulse.

"We cannot do much for him here, Miss Benson. I have a carriage outside to take him home. I shall want you both to-night. Will you follow as quickly as possible? I must go with Benson."

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The driver was summoned, and, with a womanly tenderness, Dr. Trevor lifted Cyril into the carriage. Then the two girls made their rapid preparations for spending the night at the Rectory.

"I must look at the child before I leave," said Edith.

She found her lying asleep on motherly Mrs. Hewitt's knee. She had undressed the poor little thing, and bathed her head, and her wet clothes were drying on a horse before the fire.

"Do you know who she is, ma'am?" Mrs. Hewitt asked, in a whisper.

"I think it is one of the little Fenshaws—in Corrie Street. They are very poor, but quite respectable. We are going down to the Rectory for to-night. On the way I will call and see."

"Anyhow, the poor little one had better be left here for to-night. I will look after her, and the cat too. Is Mr. Benson very ill, miss?" said Mrs. Hewitt.

"Dr. Trevor does not say anything yet. He is still unconscious. I fancy we shall take it in turns to sit up with him to-night."

"Do you think he was hurt in saving the child?"

"We know nothing," Edith answered, with a choke in her voice.

"It will be the worst night's work that has ever fallen on St. Chads if harm has happened to him."

"God forbid that it has," Edith answered sadly. "Good-night, Mrs. Hewitt. You shall hear from us in the morning."

All the night through three watchers sat by

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Cyril's bedside, and when the cold, grey dawn broke over the city, he stirred and opened his eyes, with a strange, puzzled light in them.

"Where am I?" he said, as Dr. Trevor bent over him. "I think I fell with a child in my arms. Is she hurt?"

Dorothy's calmness dissolved itself in a smothered sob.

"The child is well enough. Your business just now is to drink this and keep quite quiet."

Cyril obeyed as simply as a child, and turned his head away and closed his eyes, and still Dr. Trevor sat and watched. Once more Cyril spoke.

"Trevor, what is the matter with me? I cannot think. My brain feels stupefied."

"My dear fellow, you are not required to think," Dr. Trevor answered authoritatively. "You must lie quiet, and take everything I give you without remonstrance or question."

Soon he rose from his seat, and beckoned Dorothy from the room. Her face was ghastly pale, and drawn with anxiety.

"What is it? Will he die?" she asked, with the awful brevity bred of despair.

"God alone knows," answered Dr. Trevor. "The case is one of too great responsibility for me to undertake alone. I require a second opinion. I should like to call in Weston, the great brain doctor, if you think well."

"Call in anybody that you like; but oh, how I wish my grandmother was here!" said Dorothy, with a little cry of despair.

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"I am going the moment the telegraph-office is open to send for her," said Dr. Trevor reassuringly. "Barrett is waiting down-stairs to take any message, or relieve the watch by your brother's bedside. I want you and Edith to take a little rest by turns. We shall need all our strength."

"You think very seriously of Cyril's illness?" said Dorothy, with quivering lips.

"I know nothing certainly, but it is, at the lightest, complete collapse of nervous power, which will mean months of perfect rest and change before he can do anything again. Our present course is clear. Keep him quiet, and directly he is strong enough, move him away, but that must not be thought of yet. Will you be strong and brave, and try to face this?" and Dr. Trevor looked kindly at the sad face before him.

"Yes," said Dorothy quietly. "I can face *anything* if Cyril lives. You are telling me all the truth. You do not think he is in danger now?"

Dr. Trevor paused.

"You drive me into a corner, Miss Benson. I am afraid your brother is in a very critical condition, but I may be wrong. Weston may take a more favourable view."

"I will go back to him," said Dorothy impatiently. "I cannot waste this precious time. I dare not believe that you are right, or my heart would break."

"Hush!" said Dr. Trevor gently, taking her hand. "You are over-tired. You need food and rest. I will send off the necessary telegrams, and

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Barrett and I will stay with Benson till you and Edith come back. *Everything* depends on your cheerfulness and calmness."

Dorothy looked into the kind, tender face.

"You are kind," she said, tears welling into her eyes. "I will do as you think best."

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CHAPTER XIV

SYLVIA AT MONCKTON COURT

March 15.

I HAVE been at the Abbey all the morning, arranging flowers for Lady Wylmington, who comes down to-day. She has been in London all the winter. I think as she gets older she finds it hard to tear herself away from her grandson.

I have missed her dreadfully, although I have written to her very often, but writing is not like talking. Aunt Annie is half jealous of my devotion to Lady Wylmington, and teazes me about it a good deal in a good-humoured fashion. And when I announced at breakfast this morning that I was going to the Abbey to put some spring flowers in Lady Wylmington's boudoir, I was greeted with gentle derision.

"I should have thought there were servants enough at the Abbey, my dear, to arrange the flowers without your assistance."

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"So there are," I promptly answered, "but Lady Wylmington will like my bouquets the best."

"Well, Jem can walk with you and carry your basket," said Aunt Annie, taking up the paper.

She always seems to think Jem is a kind of retriever, whose chief duty it is to fetch and carry for me.

"Jem can do as he likes," I said, looking up at him with a smile. "My basket is not heavy, and I can carry it myself."

"I am coming your way, Sylvia. What time do you start?"

"Directly," I said. "I can gather the flowers on my way."

There was a faint fragrance in the woods as we wended our way, and Jem searched for the first white violets, and found me a tiny bunch to pin into my jacket, and I scraped away the *débris* of fallen leaves, and found some beautiful feathery moss that the autumn and winter storms had hidden from view. Presently my crocuses should peep out of the green, and be a regular spring greeting to Lady Wylmington when she comes home to-night.

Jem bade me good-bye at the Abbey, and I asked leave to go into Lady Wylmington's boudoir. There were not wanting tokens of her ruling passion (her love for her grandson) in the various portraits of him scattered all over the room. There were at least half-a-dozen likenesses of him in different stages of existence, and under each one was written the date and age at which it was

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taken in Lady Wylmington's handwriting. Cyril, in short frocks, looked out at me with handsome, defiant eyes, speaking of a high temper that would require much curbing; Cyril on horseback, at the age of six, looked conscious of achievement and purpose; Cyril at twelve was a splendidly handsome boy, with eyes that looked as if they had caught the vision of the Holy Grail, a look that was intensified in the later photographs. I wondered to myself if every one's likenesses would show such a gradual development of character, and I put my bowl of crocuses and moss on Lady Wylmington's writing-table just below the large cabinet likeness of him that stood in a frame at the back of the table. I pleased myself by fancying that he would like to look at them as much as Lady Wylmington. I *almost* expected to find a pair of worn-out baby-shoes under a glass case, labelled "My grandson's first shoes;" but after all, a love like Lady Wylmington's is a very beautiful thing, and if one smiles over it, it is with a very tender feeling.

March 17.—I left Lady Wylmington one clear day to arrange her affairs, and this afternoon I ran off directly after lunch to see her. I found her with her account book before her on her writing-table, but she slipped it at once into a drawer, and welcomed me with a smile.

"I stayed away yesterday so that I might not interrupt you, but I have done it after all," I said penitently.

"You are welcome, my dear, whenever you choose to come," said Lady Wylmington caress-

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ingly; "as welcome as the pretty flowers that I found ready to greet my return."

"Then you *did* like them," I cried triumphantly. "I shall tell Aunt Annie, who, I believe, thought me intolerably fussy for coming to arrange them."

"But you understand me better, Sylvia," said Lady Wylmington gently. "Sit down, child, and tell me what you have been doing with yourself all the winter;" and Lady Wylmington put her hand under my chin, and looked searchingly into my face.

"I have been happy—fairly happy, at least. I liked being here better than in London. I have been a great deal at the Vicarage. The Wingfields are *such* a nice lot, Lady Wylmington, and I hear from them all about Edith and the work at St. Chads. I made some flannel petticoats for Mrs. Wingfield to give away at Christmas, and I know all the poor people in the place. There! do you think I have wasted the winter?"

Lady Wylmington rarely laughed, but she laughed now at my evident appreciation of my winter employments.

"I think your merry ways must do the poor people good, Sylvia. I hope you will never lose them."

"Jem is so good to me," I went on. "He does just what I wish about things, and he is such a good landlord. I think he takes much more interest in these things than he did. He does not leave it all to his steward."

I rose at last to go. Cyril's name had not

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passed our lips. I felt I must know something about him before I went away.

"How is Mr. Benson?" I asked, as I stood before the glass fastening on my hat.

"He says he is well," said Lady Wylmington, with a faint sigh.

"But you don't think so?"

"He is terribly thin, but I dare say I am over-anxious."

"And is he happy?" I faltered.

"Certainly, my dear," answered Lady Wylmington quickly. "Cyril is not a man who makes happiness his end and aim, but it often comes to him in his work. To none of us is granted perfect happiness, but I should say he is happier than most men."

With this I had to be satisfied, and I felt that Lady Wylmington was right. I had sacrificed my right to discuss Mr. Benson and his work.

March 19.—I had rather a blow this morning. I had a letter from mother telling me that father cannot get away as soon as he expected, and that they will not be home till June. I was so bitterly disappointed that I could not eat my breakfast.

"What is it, Sylvia?" asked Jem, looking at my woe-begone face.

"Father and mother are not coming home till June," I answered, with a choke in my voice.

"Oh, is that all? Then you will have to stay with us a bit longer," said Jem unsympathetically. "It does not matter, Sylvia. We will go up to London quite early, and you shall have a jolly time."

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"You will find the time slip by more quickly than you imagine," said Aunt Annie kindly, "and we are glad to keep you."

I murmured "Thank you," but I felt very sad all day.

March 25.—Aunt Annie has been called away from home quite suddenly by the illness of a cousin, so she wrote to Lady Wylmington and asked her to let me spend a few days with her. So here am I established at the Abbey, and as happy as the day is long. Jem openly grumbled at what he was pleased to call my "desertion" of him, but Aunt Annie seemed to think it would not do for me to stay at the Court in her absence. I was delighted at her decision, as I wanted to be with Lady Wylmington. The last time I stayed here was just after the fire at the Court. I am in the same room, and it brings everything back to me so vividly.

March 28.—This has been a dreadful day, and yet it began so brightly. Jem came quite early to take me for a ride. It was a lovely bright morning, and we had a fine scamper along the hills.

"Mother has written to say that her cousin is so ill that she does not think she can possibly return for a week, Sylvia," said Jem dolefully. "Do you think Lady Wylmington will want you for as long as that?"

I laughed gaily as I dismounted at the door of the Abbey, throwing my reins to the groom who had come to fetch my horse.

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"My dear boy," I said, "Lady Wylmington would have me for months and make no moan. I dare say it is a little dull for you by yourself. I will ask Lady Wylmington to invite you to dinner to-night. You can wait for a minute if you like, and I will come down with her answer."

Jem remained seated on his horse at the door, flicking his boot with his whip in a restless, discontented fashion.

I flew up the stairs to Lady Wylmington's boudoir, expecting her to be there as usual, but the room was empty. I ventured to follow her to her bedroom, as Jem was waiting below. I knocked at the door, and at first received no answer, but after a moment I heard a hesitating step come across the floor, and the door was unlocked.

"I beg your pardon," I said apologetically, "but Jem is so dull. I came to ask—" and then I came to a dead stop. There was something in Lady Wylmington's face that froze me into silence. She looked as if she had received a blow.

"There is something the matter!" I gasped.

"Come in, Sylvia. Half-an-hour ago I received this. You must help me to get ready. I must catch the twelve o'clock train from Taunton."

With misty eyes I read the telegram she put into my hands. It was from Dr. Trevor.

"Benson seriously ill. Come without delay."

I flung my arms, weeping, round Lady Wylmington's neck.

"Take me with you," I sobbed. "Let me be at

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your house in London. Don't leave me so far away from news of him. Take me too, dear Lady Wylmington."

Very gently she disengaged my arms.

"You must help me now, my dear. Nothing must keep me from my poor boy. My maid is busy putting up her things and my own. The carriage comes round in a quarter of an hour, and you shall come with me to the station. You shall talk to me then, but now I must get ready."

We did not talk much after all on that drive. Lady Wylmington sat with folded hands and a far-away look on her face. I felt that I dare not interrupt her silent communing with God. Yet as we neared Taunton I was compelled to speak.

"Lady Wylmington," I said, "if it is not asking too much, will you let me have a line to say how you find Cyril, and what his illness is?"

She turned to me and took my hand.

"My poor Sylvia, I fear I have forgotten you. Yes, I will write at once. You shall not suffer any anxiety that I can save you from. Of course you will make the Abbey your home till Mrs. Carew returns."

"Thank you; and if Cyril asks for me, may I come to see him?"

"That must be contingent on the doctor's orders. His life may depend upon his being kept perfectly quiet," said Lady Wylmington, drawing me to her side.

"But if it won't hurt him," I persisted. "I only ask it if he wishes it."

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"You see the significance of what you ask, Sylvia. You see what it implies. You are not engaged to Cyril."

I was shaking from head to foot.

"No," I said; "but if he recovers I *shall be.* If he allows any one to be with him and nurse him, and will have me as his wife, I shall marry him. If he gets well and strong, and can go back to St. Chads, I am prepared to go with him. 'To prison and to death,' you once said. Now, when I feel him slipping from me, I know I love him well enough for that;" and then I broke into sobs that would not be repressed.

Lady Wylmington folded me close in her kind motherly arms, soothing and caressing me.

"God bless you, my dear. If Cyril asks for you I will write, and leave it to you to decide what to do; only, if you come, there must be no mention of this till he is strong enough to bear the joy."

I came back to the Abbey and found the perfect quiet and solitude of the place soothing. I liked to feel that I was in Cyril's home, at liberty to think of him as much as I liked without observation or question.

Jem came to see me in the course of the afternoon.

"Shall you stay here by yourself and leave me alone at the Court? It seems rather silly, does it not, Sylvia?"

"Lady Wylmington told me to stay here till Aunt Annie comes home, and you can come over and see us every day, Jem."

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"You are awfully cut up about this," continued Jem, not looking at me, but walking off to the window.

"Yes; it has upset me dreadfully."

"If I can help you in any way, you know I am ready to do so;" still with his head turned away.

"You have always been ready from my childhood up," I answered gratefully. "You have been very good to me, dear Jem."

I went for a walk by myself that day, and on my return I heard the church bell ringing for Evensong at five o'clock, and I stole into the church and went quietly into a back seat. I seemed closer to Cyril there than anywhere else. There were only a few of us there, the Wingfield girls, an old woman or two, and myself. Cyril was prayed for. I suppose Lady Wylmington sent in his name before she started.

I felt as if I battered heaven's gates with my prayers, as if in my stormy fervour I must win the petition that I so passionately sought. Cyril's life, just his life. I never prayed like that before.

April 2.—This morning I received my summons. Cyril is dreadfully ill. The great brain-doctor gives a very bad account of him, and I believe scarcely holds out a hope of his recovery. I think, from the strong self-control under which Lady Wylmington writes, that she too thinks that Cyril will die. I *cannot* and *will* not think so! He is so young, so useful, and so good.

He talks of me very often, Lady Wylmington

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says, and she believes it would give him joy to see me. Dr. Trevor, when asked if it would harm him to see a friend of whom he frequently spoke, said he might see any one that he wished to see, but that it should be quickly if at all. So he, too, fears the worst.

Directly after breakfast Jem called in to see how I fared. He found me with my letter in my hand. I was busy, thinking how to act for the best.

"You have news, Sylvia?" said Jem.

I handed him my letter without note or comment. I heard him breathing heavily.

"What does this mean?" he asked, almost sternly. "Why does Benson ask for you? By what right does Lady Wylmington suggest that you should go and see him?"

My tears were dry. I felt brave and strong now, ready to carry out my plan in the face of any opposition.

"It means that Cyril Benson proposed to me last winter, and that I refused him."

"Well!" said Jem, waiting for the sequel.

"It means that I then made a great mistake; that I did not know my own heart; that if he dies and I never see him again, I shall have to suffer a life-long regret."

"And if he lives, if he gets well, what then?" questioned Jem huskily.

"I shall marry him."

There was a dead silence. Then Jem rose and began pacing up and down the room. His face was as pale as death.

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"It is a facer, Sylvia. You must let me get accustomed to the notion. What do you propose to do now?"

"I am going to London by the twelve o'clock train."

"By yourself? It is impossible!" cried Jem angrily, stopping in his walk.

"My maid could go with me," I faltered.

"Look here, Sylvia. I told you the other day I could do anything for your sake. I wish you had trusted me months ago. You would have spared me a shock."

"I did not know until I heard he was ill, indeed I did not. I never meant to deceive you."

Jem waved his hand as if to silence me.

"And now," he went on, as if I had not spoken, "I will take you up to London to see this man whom you love. Listen, Sylvia, I would gladly change places with him."

"Don't, Jem, don't!" I cried, stretching out my hands. "I cannot bear it now. I trust you entirely. I put myself in your hands. Ah, how good you are to me. Just to see him again is what I wish; then I will come back."

"I will bring the carriage for you at eleven o'clock punctually. I think you had better take your maid with you. Mother would wish it. I shall put up for a night or two at our town house. Remember, I have business to attend to in London, and can make it coincide with seeing you up and down. There is an explanation for

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it all, if you do not wish to be considered under my especial escort."

I always knew Jem was a gentleman, but I never felt it with such a passion of gratitude as I did at this moment. I think I tried to express it, but he told me almost gruffly that he did not want to be thanked; it was only what "any fellow" would do who had a "pretty cousin" to look after.

I wanted for nothing on the journey. Every wish I had was forestalled, and Jem settled himself in a far corner of the carriage and pretended to go to sleep. I knew it was only pretence, because whenever I stirred his eyes opened, with the question—

"Do you want anything, Sylvia?"

When we reached London, he first saw me safely landed at Lady Wylmington's house. He shook hands with me at the door.

"You will let me know when you think of returning to Monckton," he said. "I dare say I could manage to go down the same day. I shall not look you up till you send for me."

Dear, faithful Jem!

Lady Wylmington was not in when I arrived, but a room had been got ready for me. She had not slept at home since her return, but had telegraphed her intention of coming home to-night. She arrived about ten o'clock. She had aged perceptibly since we parted only a few days ago, but she was perfectly calm and self-possessed.

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"I was certain you would come," she said. "To-morrow I will take you to him."

"How is he?" I asked.

"Precisely the same as when I arrived, neither better nor worse, except that he loses strength."

"He does not get up?" I inquired.

"He is carried on to the sofa for a few hours every day. He is perfectly conscious, but he talks very little. Your interview must be quite a short one, dear."

"What does Dr. Trevor say?"

"Nothing! He fears the worst."

"And you?" I cried, clinging desperately to the last straw of hope.

For one instant Lady Wylmington's composure gave way. Her face quivered and a few tears forced their way down her cheeks.

"I think my brave boy's warfare is accomplished, and I would not have it otherwise."

"You don't want him to get well!" I exclaimed, with a shock of surprise.

"He could never be well again. His recovery, if possible, could be merely a partial one, with maimed health, and even, in time, maimed intellect. You would not wish that, Sylvia?"

"I want him to live. I want to be with him, if only for a little while," I whispered.

"I think God is too good to let you have that wish granted," Lady Wylmington answered, with a slight shiver. "You don't really wish it, dear child?"

Ah, not yet could I say "Thy Will be done," so

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I kept silent. I spent most of that night on my knees.

April 3.—Lady Wylmington looked a little rested this morning. She had not had a proper night's rest since she came up from Monckton, and she was quite worn out. We left early this morning in the carriage for St. Chads. I had only been once in Cyril's house before, when I went to arrange with him about the concert.

"You will be mistress of yourself. You will not excite Cyril," said Lady Wylmington, almost with an air of entreaty, as we neared the Rectory.

"Yes," I said. I felt I could keep my promise. For his sake I could keep calm, even if my heart were breaking.

"Do they know I am coming?" I asked suddenly.

"None of them. You see it was not settled. I did give Dr. Trevor a hint, in case he might wish to forbid it."

There was straw laid down for many yards in front of the Rectory, as Cyril found the noise in the street distracting, so we drew up so silently that we entered the house before any one knew that we had come.

Lady Wylmington took me into the library, and bade me sit down whilst she went up-stairs.

I sat there alone, desolate, unutterably desolate, before the fire. At last the door was pushed open slowly, reluctantly, and Dorothy Benson stood before me in her nursing print dress, white apron,

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and cap. She looked years older, and her lips twitched with the effort to keep back her tears. I was the first to break the silence.

"How is your brother?" I said, advancing to kiss her.

"Just the same—no change," she said wearily. "Lady Wylmington tells me you have come all the way from Somersetshire to see him. It was very good of you, Sylvia."

It was the first time she had ever called me by my Christian name. Her words were kind, but her manner froze me to my heart.

"Edith is in bed," she said. "We take it by turns to sit up, and Dr. Trevor is always within call. He lives here at present."

"Will you go to bed, please, now?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, again speaking as if she were in a dream. "I must try and keep strong for him as long as he wants me."

I waited down below for hours, I think. I cannot tell how long. Dr. Trevor came at last and shook hands with me.

"Benson is on the sofa up-stairs, and talked of you, so Lady Wylmington told him that you were waiting to see him. Can you come?"

"Yes," I answered. "Will it hurt him to see me?"

"Not if you keep calm. *Nothing* can hurt him, I am afraid," said Dr. Trevor sadly.

I followed him blindly up the stairs; nothing was clear before me. He opened a door and motioned me to enter. Then he left the room

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and closed the door behind him. I saw the outline of Lady Wylmington's figure sitting somewhere near the window, and on the sofa lay Cyril, but not the Cyril I knew. He was transfigured in some way. His strong, lithe form looked nerveless, his face was so thin, and the eager light had died out of his eyes, and was replaced by an ineffable calm.

The moment I saw him I knew my prayer was fruitless. The Angel of Death was brooding over him. I could almost feel his wings.

"Sylvia," said the gentle voice, without a trace of agitation in it.

"Yes, Cyril;" and with quick footsteps I crossed the room and knelt beside him. Here, in the very face of death, for one brief quarter of an hour, I felt him mine, all mine.

"God is good," said Cyril. "I so longed to see your face, and you are here. Now I have no regret in going."

His hand rested on my head a moment, and I took it and held it fast between my own.

"*Must* you go, Cyril? I would try to take care of you."

A bright light came over his face. He knew I meant what I said.

"The good God knows best," he answered. "He loosed my hand from yours, Sylvia. It would have been intolerable to leave you behind."

"But I might have saved you from working so hard," I said sadly.

"To some God gives a long time to work, and

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to others but a short one, Sylvia. I am crippled and disabled in the fight. I did little enough when I had all my strength. I am glad to go."

"I feel as if I would like to go too, Cyril. I would not be frightened with you."

"No, darling. You will live to be the joy to others that you have been to me."

"Not joy, Cyril. Pain and sorrow."

"A blessing I have thanked God for many times," he repeated firmly.

A great silence fell. I sat by him, still holding his hand. The minutes were going, my last precious minutes, but I was almost past speaking. I dare not hurt Cyril by breaking into the sobs that choked my utterance.

"Cyril, are you frightened?" I whispered.

"No, darling. I shall see Him face to face."

"Don't you want to stay?" I asked.

"No, Sylvia; I am too tired. 'More life and fuller that I want.'"

"I shall miss the way without you."

"Never, darling. The Master guides you, not I."

"May I stay with you now till—" I *could* not finish the sentence.

"No, darling, it would not be good for you. Sylvia, I prayed to see your face. I wanted to look at it just once more. God has been good to me."

He took his thin hands and turned my face to his, looking at it steadily, earnestly, and I bore it unflinchingly, without a moan.

"You must go now, my precious one. We are

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still members of the Church universal, whether on this side or the other. Not far apart, my dear one."

Yes, I felt I must go, for I could not bear the strain of keeping back my tears. I rose unsteadily to my feet, put both my arms about his neck, and kissed him.

Lady Wylmington came behind me and put a hand on my shoulder, and it was her kind hand that led me to the door.

"Don't leave him," I said. "I know the way," but when I reached the library a giddiness came over me and I fainted dead away.

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CHAPTER XV

EXTRACTS FROM LADY WYLMINGTON'S NOTE-BOOK

Monckton Abbey, April 10.

I MUST write down my recollections of this past long week whilst they are fresh in my memory. Now I feel as though the merest detail were engraven on my mind for ever, but the leisure to record them may not be mine later on, when the wheels of life have begun to revolve as of old, and arrears of work have to be taken up.

From the moment of my first seeing Cyril in that state of quiet consciousness which he maintained until within twelve hours of his death, I felt certain he would not be given back to us ; and the verdict of the specialist allowed us no hope. Aneurism of the brain, he said, probably of some years standing, lying latent and unsuspected, but slowly progressive all the while. Probably the hard work, the many

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severe mental strains of the past year had quickened the mischief and hastened the crisis, but the original disease must have been of long standing, due possibly to hard application at college, or more probably to the severe and unremitting toil of his curate's days. I think it has not been St. Chads, nor his labours there which began it, although in a different sphere the disease might have lain dormant for a much longer period, and possibly have disappeared without ever being detected.

There was something like a gleam of triumph in Dorothy's sunken eyes as she came to me after hearing the verdict of the specialist.

"He is not dying of a broken heart," she said, with a catch in her voice. "It is not his love for—for Sylvia—which is killing him. Oh, I am glad—I am glad! I can give him up to his cause, his people, his love and his toil for them. But I could not have borne it that she should have killed him—she who——"

But she stopped short without finishing the sentence.

"Take care, Dorothy," I said; "if Sylvia's love could save him, we should be able to keep him with us. She is ready now to give up all for his sake. Remember, Dorothy, that Sylvia has acted throughout towards Cyril with the most perfect sincerity. She did not stoop to the smallest deceit, even to spare him and herself keen pain. She honoured him too much to use the smallest subterfuge, or to hold out hopes which she did not fully believe in. When she did not love him enough to give up all for his

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sake, she told the truth ; with infinite pain, but without flinching—and she did right. Now that a change has passed over her, now that she begins to see life from another standpoint, and to appraise the things of this world at a truer valuation, she comes with equal honesty and fearless frankness to offer herself and her all to him without reserve if he can still accept the gift. That he is beyond the reach of her loving offer is no fault and no doing of hers. She has been true throughout, as true in her refusal as in her acceptance of his love. If Cyril wishes to see her once again, I shall send for her. She has won for herself the right to say good-bye to him."

Dorothy said nothing. It was not her way to speak many unnecessary words in those days. Poor Dorothy ! She was the most to be pitied at that time. Her whole life and being were centred in Cyril, and she knew that he was to be taken away. She had not learned the lesson of submission. She had not yet brought herself to say "Thy Will be done." My heart bleeds for her, for the pain of a silently borne grief without the sense of submission is the most terrible of all human sorrows.

I cannot write much of my boy, during those last days. There was perfect consciousness and comprehension, but such a gentle and merciful lulling of the faculties that the peaceful calmness was never broken. He knew he was leaving us, and we had many beautiful and comforting talks together; but the sense of the parting was spared to him. It

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was as though upon the confines of eternity all sense of time was swallowed up.

Outside his room the shadow of death seemed to hang like a pall upon us. The Brotherhood moved silently about with pale, careworn faces; there was a constant coming and going at the door, shabby working-men, weary-looking women, ragged little children even, pulling timidly at the bell (which was not audible in the sick-room) to ask for news of their friend.

Sometimes I was asked to speak to some more persistent inquirer; and it was infinitely pathetic to hear some of the stories poured into my ears, when I had told the anxious questioner that it was only a question of days now. Sometimes I was able to speak to Cyril of the persons I had seen, and I was struck by the wording of the messages he would in some cases send to parishioners whose cases were recalled to his mind by words of mine or of others. It seemed to me as though the light from the world beyond was already illuminating his mind. I think he himself was conscious of it; for he said once at night, when I was alone with him, "I seem to see it all so clearly now. I wish I had always done so. I have made many mistakes, but He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness. He will not let my errors hurt others. I can trust all to Him. It is like the falling into a trance, but having the eyes open. I think I never understood those words so fully before."

It was at night that he so often spoke of Sylvia, and at last expressed a wish to see her again. I

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promised to send for her, telling him of our last interview. I had no fear now of exciting him by such revelations. The merciful torpor of the faculties (if such an expression can be used where such perfect consciousness is present) kept away anything like excitement. His eyes brightened with a sense of calm joy, but there was no quickening of the pulse, no excitement or agitation.

And Sylvia came. Of the interview between the two I cannot write, although I was present at the time, in accordance with Cyril's wish. Some scenes are too solemn and sacred to be written even in one's private notes. The last farewell was spoken between them. They will meet no more till that glorious reunion comes, where parting is no more.

Poor child! I was not surprised to be summoned shortly after she had gone, and to find her in an unconscious state in the library, tended by Edith, whose sympathy was keenly excited by what she knew of the circumstances of the case. When she had recovered a little, we had a comforting talk together; and I sent her home at last with Edith, who promised to stay the night, and to sleep with Sylvia, and see her off under her good cousin's escort for Monckton on the morrow. I could not myself leave the house and my boy; for we suspected that the end was very near. That night I insisted on Dorothy's going to bed, for she looked utterly worn-out. Cyril was so quiet that all in the house went to rest, leaving me sole watcher.

When we were alone together Cyril suddenly said—

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"She is gone, of course?"

"Yes; she returns to the Abbey to-morrow. Her cousin Jem brought her up. He came this evening himself to inquire for you. I was glad to see him, and to put Sylvia into his charge, as it were. He will take her back to-morrow. He showed great feeling. I am interested in him."

"He is a good fellow, a thoroughly good fellow," said Cyril, with some emphasis; and after a pause he added quietly, "I hope Sylvia will reward him some day."

"I hope she will," I answered.

He lay thinking for awhile, and then spoke again—

"She talks to you very freely, does she not? She makes a friend of you—even in these things?"

"I think she does."

"She is wise," he said, with that winning smile of his, so like the smile of his boyhood that I felt the tears rise in my eyes, as a wave of recollection swept over me. He put out his thin, transparent hand, and I placed mine in it. The room was very still. The night-lamp burned dimly. The falling embers in the grate from time to time made a slight sound, but within the house all was very silent. He turned his face towards me, and I saw a strange light burning in his eyes.

"Tell her," he said, almost as though he had already looked into the future and read what was coming, "that no thoughts of what might have been between us two must stand between her and her

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loving duty towards another. When we meet again on the other side—when in the Resurrection we are changed into the likeness of the Glorified One, all within us will be so purified, so glorified, so transfigured, that nothing of human weakness, distrust, or jealousy can remain. Love will rise immortal and glorified, even as we do. All sin and frailty and unfaith will be done away. All things will be made new. Make her understand that. Make her see that no shadows from this transitory life can ever reach us there; that all but the love itself is absorbed in the light; that what is earthly and human can find no place in the glory that shall be revealed."

That was his last mention of and last message to Sylvia. Shortly afterwards he fell into a light sleep, still holding my hand; and from that sleep passed into a state of absolute unconsciousness from which he never awakened.

At six in the evening of the following day, just after Mr. Barrett and the youngest of the Brotherhood had returned from Evensong in the church, he passed quietly away, Mr. Barrett speaking the words of the Commendatory prayer as the last deep breaths were drawn. All the Brotherhood were with him as his spirit passed away. Dorothy knelt beside the bed with hidden face. I held one of his hands and one of hers. I think all was as he would have wished it, could he have chosen for himself.

There was some little discussion as to where he should lie. Some of the Brotherhood said, "Let it

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be amongst his own people," meaning near to St. Chads. But Mr. Barrett said—

"No; East End cemeteries are too depressing. Let him lie with his own people, his parents, with those of his name and race. It matters little what happens to the mortal remains; and yet I would rather lay him where those who love him"—and he looked from Dorothy's white set face to mine—"could visit his grave and lay flowers upon it."

And Dorothy, speaking for the first time, said—

"Our father and mother are both buried at Monckton. Let us take Cyril there."

So that settled it. Dorothy had the best right, as we all felt, to decide such a matter. It so happened that my son-in-law died at Monckton Abbey and was buried there; and his wife, my only child, made her home with me for the brief year which she survived him. I was glad to think that Cyril would rest beside them, although, as Mr. Barrett truly said, it matters but little what happens to the mortal remains of these frail bodies of ours.

Dorothy's decision seemed to mean (to my thinking at least) more than met the ear. I fancied it implied something of her own divorce from St. Chads. As yet she has not spoken a word to me of her future. All that is settled is that she remains for a time here at the Abbey. I doubt whether she will ever go back to Filey Street.

Let me write, whilst tears dim my sight, of those last hours which we spent within the precincts of St. Chads.

I passed the last night in Filey Street with the

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girls. Both had been with me from the time of Cyril's death. There was much to do and to think of, and Dorothy was best when employed in writing letters or in thinking of some needful bit of work to be accomplished. She seldom spoke, and her tears did not flow, as did Edith's, at every little touching incident, in which those days abounded. She was as calm and self-contained as ever. Poor, lonely Dorothy!

For three nights they had slept at my house in Park Lane; but upon the eve of the funeral we all went to Filey Street. By that time the girls were really worn-out, and although Dorothy at first vehemently refused to go to bed, saying she meant to pass the last night in the church, I persuaded her at last to yield this point, upon giving her a promise that she should be roused in time for the very early Celebration which was to be the first act upon the following day, before Cyril's body was taken away.

I was glad that Dorothy did not know that others beside herself had desired to hold a vigil that night in the church, or I think nothing would have kept her away, and a break.down on the morrow might have been the result; for Dorothy was not made of marble, although she almost appeared to be. Edith went with her submissively —she understands her companion better perhaps than anybody else, and Dorothy does better with one whose grief is less personal than her own.

Reassured about those two, and believing that nature would have her way with both in the familiar

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surroundings of the home which had been theirs for so many months, I was free myself to follow the dictates of my own heart, and they drew me like a magnet to the church of St. Chads.

The Brothers had come to me the previous day —it was very touching, I thought, how they deferred to me in every way and consulted my wishes in all things—to ask if I approved their wish of letting Cyril's body rest for the last night within the church itself, that it might be carried thence upon the morrow, when in the early morning the bearers should come for it. They said that they believed it would be a source of great satisfaction to many beside themselves if this could be done. The choir had themselves asked for a "choral celebration" on the occasion of the final service prior to the removal of the mortal remains of him so dear to them all, and it was represented that the people would feel more than ever as though he had been in the midst of them till the very last if he were taken from the church itself when the moment came.

Of course I left everything for them to arrange as they best wished—true-hearted, loyal comrades with him in the storm and the strife. Their love for him, their deep grief at his loss, their tender remembrance of all his wishes, and their ardent desire in all things to do as he would have wished was inexpressibly touching. Even this consulting with me in matters really belonging to their own province was borrowed from my boy's habit of asking my opinion, and deferring to my judgment.

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I was glad to think that all of these staunch, true comrades of his would accompany us to-morrow, and for one night sleep beneath the roof that had always been dear to Cyril. The clergy from the neighbouring parishes had come forward with offers of assistance, coupled with words of deep respect and love for him who was gone. St. Chads would be well looked after, and the services well seen to during the two days' absence on the part of the Brotherhood, necessitated by the long journey, if they were not to half kill themselves in their anxiety to be in two places at once. Surely Cyril's brief sojourn in this place was bearing wonderful fruit.

I had not brought the girls back to Filey Street till nearly ten o'clock, and it was midnight before I had looked through some letters which were addressed to Cyril, but which had been sent to me from the Rectory as being private and personal in character. Mrs. Hewett, too, had had much to say, and, like most of her class, was long-winded in her sympathy and grief. Both, however, were perfectly sincere ; she gave me all over again the story of Cyril's rescue of the little girl and the cat, the sudden excitement and exertion incident upon which had been the immediate cause of the crisis in his illness. Every person who spoke to me at this time had some illustration to offer of my boy's tenderness, kindness, consideration, or devotion. Even his enemies had come forward to speak in his favour, and "hope nothing they had said or done had helped in any way to hurt him." I think

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some of these well-meaning persons got it rather "hot" sometimes from "Benjamin," as the youngest and most hot-headed of the brethren was called by his comrades; but the universal sorrow effectually drowned all minor differences.

It was therefore some time after midnight before I was able to carry out my wish of going to the church. As I approached it I was aware of a dark figure standing just outside the entrance door, and I was certain that I heard the sound of a deep-drawn sob as I drew nearer.

At the sound of my footsteps upon the flags, a man suddenly turned round, and in the mingled light of the moon in the sky and the lamp overhead I recognized in him a notable Dissenter, by name Martin, of whom I had heard Cyril speak many times during his residence here, sometimes with heat and bitterness, but recently in quite a different strain.

I suppose that by this time my face was known in the locality, for as I approached him the man took off his hat and said in a low voice that was evidently controlled with difficulty—

"Can I speak with you one moment, my lady?"

"Certainly," I answered, stopping short. "I believe I am not wrong in thinking that you are the Mr. Martin of whom my grandson has spoken from time to time?"

"Did he speak of me?" asked the man, with hungry eagerness. "Had he a thought to spare for me? Did he say what an enemy I had been

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to him, and how he had heaped coals of fire upon my head?"

"I have heard from time to time about the troubles which have beset him," I answered; "but at the last there was nothing but peace and love in his heart towards all. You may understand more clearly than I do the meaning of his words respecting yourself. He said to me once, when your name had passed his lips, 'Tell him that the debt is wiped out, is cancelled. It was a thing between himself and me alone. This ends it.' Then, after he had remained silent for awhile, as if following out a train of thought suggested by these words, he added, 'If only men could see that we being many members are yet one Body; how much would be saved us in our earthly warfare!'"

A look of deep emotion passed over the man's rugged face. It was with difficulty he enunciated his words.

"My lady, I thank you for telling me," he said. "I don't know what to answer nor what to say. I'm broken down by it—that is what I am. But mine is a debt which may never be cancelled. I have promised, before God, to pay it. May I write to you about it?" he said huskily.

"I shall be glad to hear from you at any time," I answered. "I am my grandson's executor, and I am better acquainted with his affairs than any other person, I believe. Here is my card with my address. And now will you come into the church with me? Perhaps you know——"

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I had no need to complete the sentence. His face told me that he knew. It quivered all over strangely, and he said—

"Yes—I'd like to feel myself—near him once again—the best friend I ever had."

With that I turned and went into the building, and I heard the slow, heavy step of my companion following me.

It was a solemn and beautiful and impressive sight upon which my eyes fell as I entered the door and looked straight up the centre aisle of the church. The body of the building was almost in darkness, few burners being lighted, and those turned low. All the light, none of it very bright, was concentrated upon the chancel and upon a few kneeling figures in the upper part of the church.

Before the altar, where he had so often stood to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, stood the coffin containing the mortal remains of Cyril Benson. It was covered by a white pall, and around it were grouped some of those floral wreaths and crosses of pure white blossoms which had come in from many quarters during the past days. The Brothers were all there, kneeling in their accustomed places, and many of the men of the choir occupied their customary seats, wearing their surplices as if at a service.

From time to time the organ played softly, and some verses of a solemn litany were chanted. Once during the time that I remained Mr. Barrett went to the lectern and read one of those stirring,

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comforting passages from the writing of the great Apostle which have proved the solace and stay of generations of Christian mourners. From time to time the door behind me opened, and a pale-faced woman or toil-hardened man would slip in, kneel for a time with bowed head, and steal out again. Not unfrequently the intervals of silence were interrupted by the stifled sob of some invisible mourner. The voices raised from time to time in psalm or chant were often husky and broken. It was a scene not to be forgotten or effaced from the memory. I could have wished that Dorothy knew, yet I would not have had her with me. She had need of all her strength for the day which had already come upon us.

I returned to Filey Street and rested for a short time; but soon Mrs. Hewett, who had not been to bed either, was stirring, and preparing the breakfast it was imperative for us all to partake of before we finally left the house. The girls, who were both sleeping, and had both slept soundly, were quickly roused, and speedily ready. Dorothy in her deep mourning looked small and pinched and white, but was very calm. Edith was full of gentle sisterly attentions to her, which were accepted more gratefully than of old. She looked after us both with unobtrusive kindliness, and I think the tears which kept rising in her eyes were as much for Dorothy's silent tearless despair as for grief for him who was gone.

The first pale film of coming day was in the air as we entered the church together. There had

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been just a little change since I left two hours or more ago. The clergy had withdrawn. The boys of the choir as well as the men were now in their places. The organ was pealing with solemn power, and a congregation of some two score had mustered in the church.

On the stroke of four came the clergy in their vestments, and the service commenced. Mr. Barrett officiated, and very beautifully did he perform his part, giving to each promise and comforting thought its full significance and meaning. The softly-sung responses bespoke not only the careful, loving training bestowed by Cyril on his choir, but the deep personal feeling of each individual there, and the occasional breaks one heard in the individual voices spoke an eloquent music of their own.

I have often wished (and never more than on that occasion) that our reformers in their zeal for purity had been just a little less ruthless in their pruning down of our Communion Office, and had left to us the beautiful Commemorations of living and departed which the ancient liturgies of the Church possess, and which our brethren of the Greek and Roman Communion retain, though possibly in a somewhat perverted form. But at least if the voice of the Church is silent here, our hearts can individually be lifted up, and we can remember before God those who are not lost, but only gone before, and who are still one with us in the mystical unity of the one Body.

The service ended, there was a long solemn

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pause; and then a slight stir at the bottom of the church bespoke the entrance of others and the final act in the solemn ceremony. Edith gave a slight quiver and grasped my hand, but Dorothy stood silent and rigid, her eyes bent upon the white-palled coffin, as though she would never be able to take them thence.

The bearers moved with soft steps up the aisle, but it was not the hands of the hirelings that bore Cyril's body from St. Chads. Eight of the choir-men stepped from their stalls towards the coffin, and reverently bore it upon their shoulders; whilst as they took the first forward step the organ pealed forth once more.

No dead march or strain of mournful cadence echoed then through the church and filled our ears, but a song of triumph taken up by the clergy and the people, led by the clear-voiced boys, filling the sacred building, drowning the heavy steps of the bearers, and making a glorious swelling harmony that lifted the soul above the thought of death and sorrow, to the triumph song with which one day earth and heaven will ring. "For all Thy Saints who from their labours rest," and the "Alleluia!" rang through the vaulted roof and arches at each repetition with a thrill that fills my heart even yet.

But this was only the beginning.

The clergy and choir returned for a few moments to change their robes. We waited in the church, although others left, until their return. And as the first shafts of sunlight struck through the

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eastern window with the glory of a spring-tide dawn, we moved in a body to the door of the church, where, drawn up in rank, were the hearse and its burden, my carriage for myself and the two girls, and another for the brethren and Dr. Trevor.

But what was the sight that met our eyes as we stepped out into the clear morning light? No sound had reached us in the church. I looked to find the street as empty, or almost as much so, as when we entered some forty minutes previously. But instead of this, the whole open space round the church and Rectory was filled to overflowing by a quiet, patient crowd; and every street converging upon the place was thronged as far as the eye could see by a waiting multitude.

Yes, the working-man's day had not yet begun, and it seemed to me (unless the mist which rose before my eyes hindered a clear vision) as though almost every man, woman, or child who had any connection with St. Chads had gathered here this morning to pay a last silent tribute of respect to the friend and pastor who had been taken from them.

There was just a little delay as we appeared, not from the pressure of the crowd, for the people made way for us with every mark of silent sympathy; but because the ranks had divided to admit the passage of a number of little children, their hands filled with flowers, poor little nosegays of the commoner flowers that are brought daily to the London markets, which they held out

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towards us shyly and almost tearfully, some seeming overawed by the silent solemnity of the scene, but all pitifully eager that their nosegays should be presented, and be given as it were to the friend whom they had loved and lost.

"He were so good to us!" said one. "Us all loved 'un!" whispered another. "Mayn't we give him our flowers, please?" added voice after voice as we appeared; and the little pale-faced throng closed about us, being no longer repulsed as they had been previously by the hirelings, and our hands and arms were speedily full of flowers, which were in due order laid upon the coffin, from which the more costly trophies were removed to make room for the children's gifts.

"He would have wished it so," I said; and they all agreed. Dr. Trevor, standing beside Edith, said in a low tone to us as the change was being made—

"These flowers represent the breakfast of many a poor home this morning. The children or their parents must have been up before the first streak of day to reach the early markets and be back in time. These are what I call Royal Honours."

I think none of the rest of us could speak. The hushed sound of the voice of a great multitude murmuring one name, the tears of the women, the pale, eager faces of the children, now wreathed in tearful smiles as they saw how and where their simple offerings were disposed, all combined to form a spectacle infinitely moving. I feared for

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my own composure as well as for that of Dorothy. Edith was weeping silently under her veil; and there were suspicious-looking drops in Dr. Trevor's eyes.

We reached our carriage, and in a few moments the procession had started. And only then did I realize how Cyril was to leave the precincts of St. Chads. The crowd had not come simply to witness the removal of the coffin from the church. As we moved on, men, women, and children fell into rank behind us, seven or eight in a row, and followed. We heard the tread as of a great army, we heard that sound inseparable from a vast concourse of persons gathered together in one place, the rising and sinking of a multitude of voices, hushed and mournful, yet swelling sometimes to a great volume of sound, and then sinking again to a mere murmur. There was the sound of weeping too, sometimes soft, sometimes loud. There are no words which will express these sounds as that comparison of Scripture—the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters.

How long that patient, loving crowd (which I afterwards heard must have numbered from one to two thousand) would have followed us, I cannot say. But when the limit of St. Chads parish was reached, our carriage stopped for a moment. Looking out of the window I saw that we had reached one of the wide open spaces sometimes found even in the East End, and I saw that the Brothers had alighted from their carriage, and that Mr. Barrett was giving the people a loving dismissal.

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His words I was unable to hear, but I could see (from the position we occupied) the foremost ranks of those humble followers, the great surging mass behind pressing forward to hear what was being said, and I distinguished the faces of the choirmen and boys, who had led the van of that voluntary procession.

The clear morning sunshine streamed down upon that moving spectacle. I could not but ask myself—Did Cyril see it? And then, just as Mr. Barrett's voice ceased, there was a sudden uplifting of many voices, and I felt a strange thrill run through me as I recognized the familiar words of an All Saints hymn dear to me from numberless associations, yet little known to the world at large—a hymn which Cyril must have taught to his choir from the love he and I both bore it, full as it was of memories of happy Sundays spent at Monckton, when we nearly always closed our hour at the piano with this very hymn—

> "Thy living saints on earth, Thy saints who sleep,
> Their holy days of love together keep."

I think it was the youngest Brother who started the hymn of dismissal; but it was instantly taken up by the choir, set to the simple metrical chant to which "Abide with me" is often sung, and although the words could scarcely be known to the crowd beyond, there was a surging sound of voices swelling and falling in rhythmical cadence, like the accompaniment of a mighty human organ, but with a grandeur and pathos in the

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sound that can never be produced by mechanical means.

For the first time that day Dorothy's composure was almost overset, and I heard a quick gasp from her, and felt her hand seek mine and hold it fast with convulsive pressure. I knew whither her thoughts had gone back—to that panelled room at Monckton Abbey, to the golden western light shining on Cyril's face as he sang, with those great earnest eyes of his fixed upon the western sky, to all those hopes and aspirations, those plans and projects inextricably connected with these words. . . . And now the final scene of his earthly career.

There was one boy's voice which rose with piercing sweetness and clearness through the sunny air, and something in its tones recalled the beauty and sweetness of Cyril's boy's voice. It thrilled our hearts, as did the words of glorious hope and promise; and as the verses rolled along one after the other, the increase in the volume of sound seemed to make it a song of triumph at the last, as indeed it was.

> "One life-blood flows through all from Thee, our Head,
> O Saviour of the living and the dead,
> And, while the world with sin and death is rife,
> THOU ART THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE."

The last words were almost a shout—a shout of victory. It seemed to me like Cyril's last message to his flock, those words of glorious promise which contain within themselves the key

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to the whole problem of human sin and misery and death. I think that none of those who heard them that day would ever quite forget. I am sure that none who witnessed that scene would think that Cyril's brief career had been lived in vain.

Then we left St. Chads behind us, with that patient, tearful crowd; and the rest of that long day passed almost like a dream.

Everything was very tenderly and beautifully done. Every mark of loving respect which friends and neighbours could offer was shown. I never saw a more beautiful funeral than Cyril's, in the glorious golden light of that April afternoon, such a wealth of spring flowers, such loving faces and tender actions. The memory of these things will sweeten our recollections of the day always; but I need not write more details. The deepest interest and pathos centred round the farewell of his flock. That to me is infinitely precious.

Sylvia was in the church, with her cousin Jem. I almost brushed his sleeve as we moved out.

"Let her follow," I whispered to him. "It is her right."

And so Sylvia stood very near to us when the last solemn farewell words were spoken; and when all was over I led her forward myself to place her cross of white violets upon the coffin, covered by the poor little nosegays of the children of St. Chads.

Mrs. Carew had sent a magnificent wreath of hot-house flowers; but I knew that Sylvia's violets

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had been gathered by her own fingers, and watered by her tears, as she had fashioned them to the emblem of her cross. I must see her again as soon as I can, and give her Cyril's last message. My boy has no more sincere mourner than Sylvia O'Connor.

April 20.—I have seen her again, and we have had a long comforting talk together. I told her every detail of those last days, of Cyril's thought of and for her up to the very last; of the touching farewell of his flock, and of all the innumerable testimonies since received from sources unknown, and unexpected, of his kindness of heart, singleness of purpose, and devotion to his life's work. She listened with soft, tearful eyes, losing not a word, and hanging on my narrative as though she would fain learn it by heart. But I think she was soothed and comforted at last; and it has been an immense relief to her to know that her rejection of his love could not have been the root of the mischief, as in her wild grief and self-reproach she had sometimes feared.

"If I had helped to kill him, I could never forgive myself—could never be happy again," she said impetuously; but I was able to tell her that the mischief must have been of far longer standing than that, and that the immediate cause of the crisis had no connection at all with any act of hers.

"If you brought pain to Cyril, my dear," I said, "you also brought happiness. He would not have been without his love for you—that I

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know well. And I think that you would not be willing to be spared the pain you suffer now, by having missed the love you could not return when it was asked for."

"Indeed, indeed I would not," she answered. "It will be the most precious memory of my life." Then she paused a long time, and said at last with mournful sadness of tone, "But shall I ever lose the feeling that I was offered the choice between the higher and the lower, and that I chose the lower?"

"Yes, Sylvia," I answered, drawing her towards me, and looking into those sweet wistful eyes of hers, from which her soul seemed to be gazing out, "you will lose that feeling when you have learned to live the higher life in that state of life to which God has called you, and from which it has not seemed His will to remove you."

She was silent, still looking earnestly at me.

"The higher life is not working at St. Chads," I said, thinking a little mournfully of my poor Dorothy and her devoted toil. "It is not being the devoted wife of a devoted clergyman. It is not even living the life that Cyril was leading, any more than giving all our goods to the poor, and our bodies to be burned, is (of necessity) charity—love. It is something infinitely greater than that. I think, my child, that the lessons you have learned, the experiences you have passed through, should be stepping-stones helping you upwards and onwards, not weights holding you back from the higher and nobler life."

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"Ah, yes, indeed you are right there!" she exclaimed earnestly; "I shall always be better, I mean I *ought* to be, for—for all this. I must not say, I suppose, for having known and loved Cyril, but for the lessons he and his life have helped to teach me."

Ah! she was learning at last! She was coming to that point I have so long wished to see, looking beyond the man, beyond the human love, to that which had sanctified his life, and made him what he was.

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CHAPTER XVI

A LAST EXTRACT FROM SYLVIA'S JOURNAL

Monckton Court, June 10.

IT is weeks and weeks since I wrote a line in my diary. I do not think I shall go on keeping one after mother comes home. I wanted to write one for her sake, to keep some slight record of my first plunge into society.

To-morrow I am to see her face to face. Their ship is signalled, and kind, faithful Jem takes me down to Plymouth to meet father and mother. I feel all trembling at the thought. Of this spring there has been nothing to tell; but that slowly I have been striving to recover my balance after the awful shock of Cyril's death. Aunt Annie wanted me to go to London again for the season; but I pleaded so eagerly to be allowed to stay down quietly here till father and mother's return, that she finally yielded. I think she knew I had gone through too much to be scolded.

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"You must know, dear child," she said, not unkindly, "that you are making yourself just a little peculiar by never wearing anything but black; for, forgive me, Sylvia, you were not engaged to poor Mr. Benson."

"No, Aunt Annie dear," I answered, with tears in my eyes; "but nobody knows *why* I wear a black dress, nor for whom. In this quiet country place one can do as one likes, and of course in my own heart I know I *was* engaged to Cyril. I should have married him if he had lived."

Aunt Annie shrugged her shoulders, but let me have my own way.

To-morrow I shall put on a white dress; father and mother are coming back. I have been reading over the story of my life for the last year and a quarter, and am amazed to discover how very differently I looked at things then and now; how ten years' experience seems to have been compressed into one. Then my one wish was to be happy, and to keep out of sight or touch of pain and sorrow. Now, even in my sheltered life, with friends who love me so well that they grant my every whim, pain and sorrow have found me out, and I would not have it otherwise, for my greatest sorrow, Cyril's death, is intermingled with my greatest joy, Cyril's love, which still lives, and is present with me always, which will help me to grow into a better woman day by day. I am not old yet, only nineteen last February, so if I live long enough, I may become more worthy of the love of such a man. I hope

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that years may deaden the sense of loss; but ah! I feel a bit of my life, young as I am, has passed away with him. I longed to stay here for many reasons: to be near Lady Wylmington is the chief one, for our mutual sorrow has drawn us very close together, and I contrive to see her nearly every day. Then Edith Wingfield is at home just now, getting her wedding trousseau ready, for as Dorothy's and her home at St. Chads had to be given up for the present, Mr. Wingfield has agreed to let the engagement to Dr. Trevor be shortened by six months. There seems no object in keeping her away longer from her love and her work. Happy Edith!

I long now with almost a sickening longing for mother. I verily believe that if she did not arrive to-morrow I should die of disappointment. To-day, after lunch, I went away to the big drawing-room by myself, and sat down before the piano and sang "Home, sweet home." I scarcely knew why, except from the feeling that for the first time since I was a child I was going to have a "sweet home" of my own. I thought of Cyril and his concert, and that lovely, lovely night at St. Chads. I believe it was the happiest night of my life, although I did not know it then. I finished, nearly with tears, when I became aware I had a listener.

Jem was leaning against the window-sill outside smoking a cigar.

"Good gracious, Sylvia," he exclaimed, in astonishment. "What is the matter with you? I

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heard you sing like that once before. I forget when—Oh, yes! I remember now. I beg your pardon. I did not mean to mention it."

Dear, bungling Jem. I rose, and went to the window, but I felt I had turned very white.

"Shall you always feel like that, Sylvia?" went on Jem, looking straight before him, not at me at all.

"Like what, Jem?" I said, a little breathlessly.

"Shall you always have great big eyes, that look so sad, when you used to be such a merry sort of a girl? Do you know you have never sung once all this spring, and I would not ask you, and now I catch you singing that thing as if your heart would break. Shall you always be sad?"

"No, Jem; I am afraid I have been selfish and you have spoiled me awfully, but don't think that I have not appreciated your kindness and goodness to me during the last few weeks."

"Oh, of course that is all bosh," said Jem impatiently, reddening to the roots of his hair.

"I only sang that song because I am looking forward so to a home with father and mother," I went on, regardless of Jem's interruption.

"And you do not mind leaving us one bit, not the least bit in the world, I believe," said Jem, half angrily.

"Oh yes, I do; but I *do* long to live with mother."

"And you will never come back," said Jem sadly.

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"Of course I shall, often and often. Perhaps I shall be here more than you will wish," I said, with a little laugh.

"You know I want you *always*, Sylvia," said Jem sturdily.

"Then want must be your master, for mother will want me more than you," I answered.

"Look here, you may think me a brute for speaking, but shall you ever come back to me for good, Sylvia?"

There was a break in Jem's voice.

"I think you kind and good, Jem, too kind to expect me to answer such a question now."

"But listen! I am not clever, as he was, nor good like him, but I love you as well as it is possible for a man to love a woman."

"Hush, Jem, I cannot bear it. Be content. Let us go on as we are," I said quickly.

"That may do for you, Sylvia, but for me—for me it is rather poor fun," said Jem disconsolately. "I never knew a fellow yet who was content to be called a brother by the girl he wants to marry."

"It is impossible to promise to marry you when my heart is full of sadness for one who has gone, and whom I love still—ah! *so* dearly," I said, clasping my hands.

"I never expected you to make any promise, but just to give me a hope," urged Jem. "Who was the fellow who served seven years for his wife? Jacob, was it? I never could abide him, but he knew how to stick to the woman he loved, and I could serve for you, my dear, seven—fourteen

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years. I could wait quite patiently without ever worrying, if you just gave me hope."

The tears sprang to my eyes. I was touched by his simple devotion.

"Not now, Jem, not yet," I answered.

A wind passed over the lawn and scattered a shower of May-blossoms at Jem's feet.

"Don't fret, Sylvia. It's all right," he said.

THE END.

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